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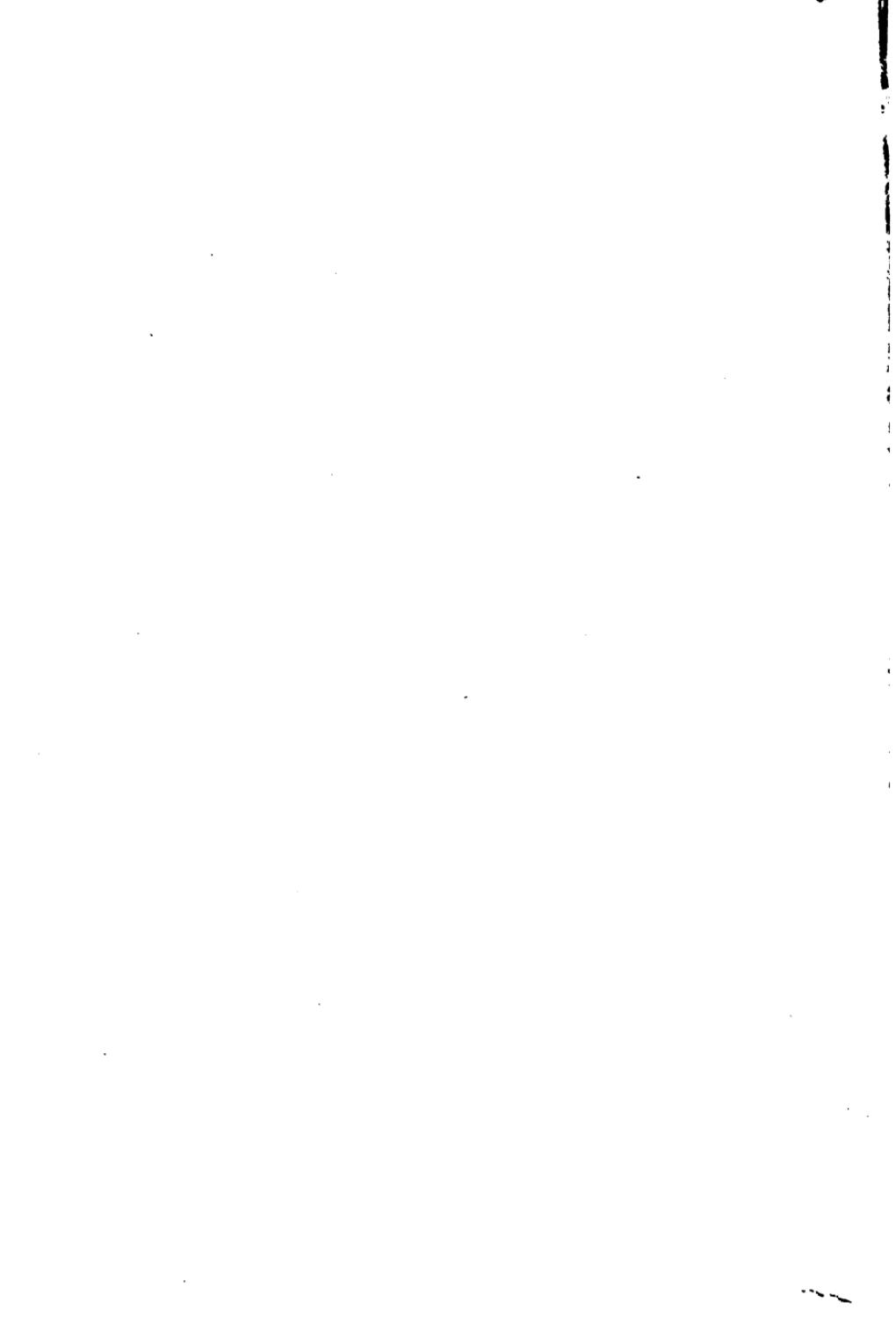


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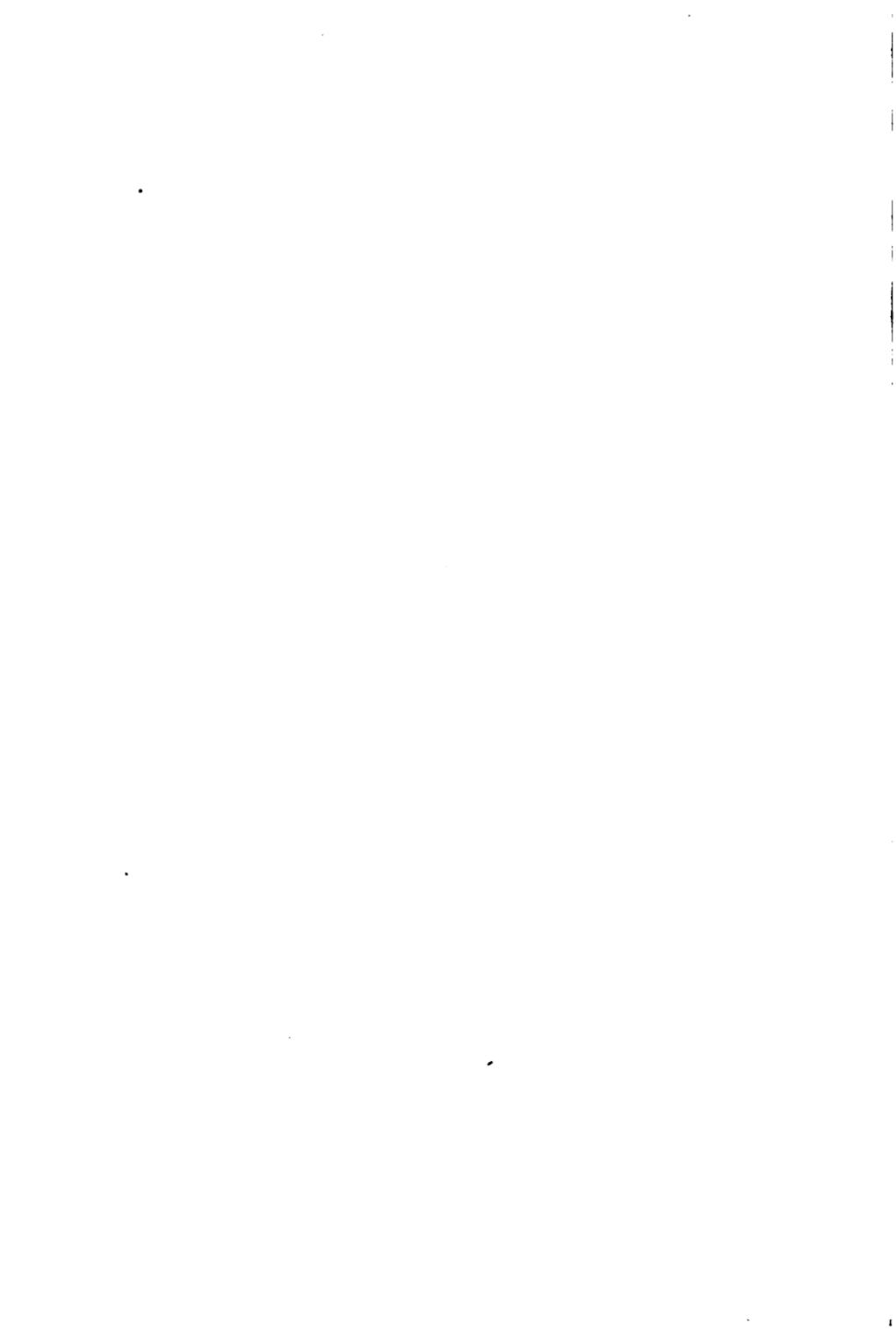
With love from Aunt Isobel  
Christmas 1912.

NAS

Heylige -



**THE CAPTAIN  
OF THE NINE**







"Using a beautiful slide, St. Mary's star infielder beat the relayed throw."

[Page 126]

# THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

BY

WILLIAM HEYLIGER

AUTHOR OF "BUCKING THE LINE" AND  
"BARTLEY, FRESHMAN PITCHER"

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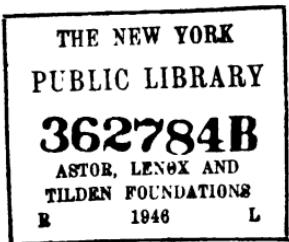


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1912

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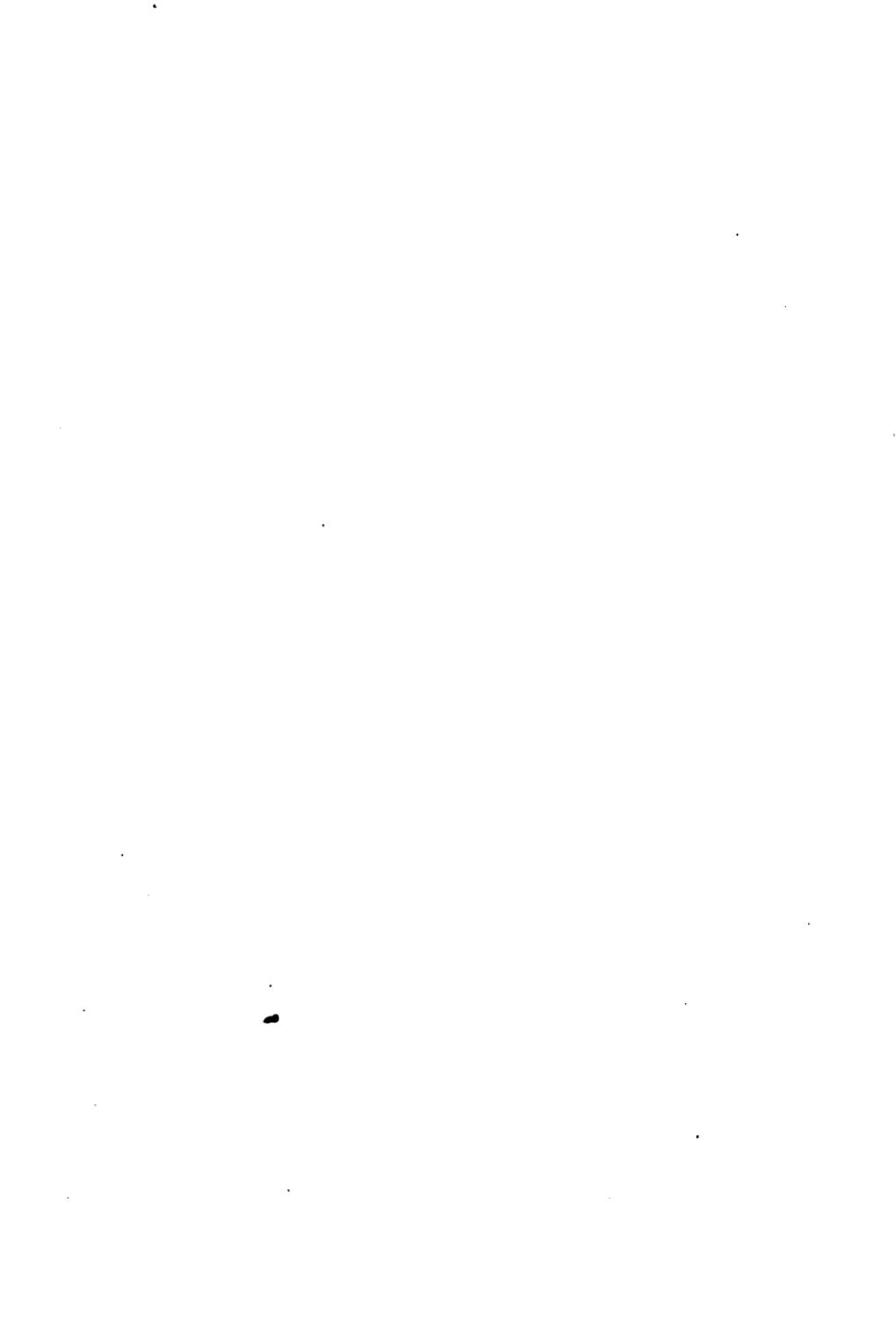
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*Published September, 1912*

Printed in the United States of America

**TO**  
**MY MOTHER**

**46 X 75 6**



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# THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEW CAPTAIN

THE St. Mary's 'Varsity infield, confident, joyous, was practicing in the cage.

"This way," barked Curtis from third base.  
"Stick it down here, old pal."

Bartley, the star 'Varsity pitcher, tossed the ball into the air and swung his bat as it came down. The leather streaked along the third-base line.

At once the infield, alert, peppery, jabbered encouragement.

"On your toes, old man."

"After it, there."

"That's a way."

Darting over to the right, Curtis scooped the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ball with his bare hand, and threw to Mellen, the second baseman. The ball hardly settled in Mellen's glove before it shot on a line to Kaufman, the giant first baseman. Kaufman, in turn, drove it to Murray, the catcher.

As the ball plunked into Murray's big mitt, Ned Kennedy, Bartley's room-mate and a 'Varsity pitcher, too, squeaked in delight.

"That's the stuff, fellows. Fine! Couldn't be better."

"We're not so worse," grinned Kaufman.

Bartley turned to Kennedy with a laugh. "We won't have much trouble if they back us up that way will we, Ned?"

"Not much," agreed Kennedy. "We can pitch straight balls—they'll do the rest."

The infielders cheered. "Leave it to us," they shouted.

It was the first week following the call for baseball candidates. Members of last year's 'Varsity infield, by agreement, had come early to the cage to try each other out. Jenkins, the coach, and Redway, the captain of the nine, had

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

not yet arrived. The infielders practically had the cage to themselves.

Again Bartley slashed the ball. This time it started on a line drive for the outfield. Mel-l-en, running furiously, leaped high in the air and speared the flying leather.

"Whee!" screamed Kennedy. "Do it again. What chance will Rockton have against us? If Jenkins were only here to see that."

"There he comes," called Bartley.

The coach and Captain Redway were entering the cage. The coach's face was clouded and troubled.

"Something's up," muttered Kennedy.

The infielders sensed as much. They came in quietly to the plate and gathered around Murray and Bartley. Redway waved his hand at them and shouted his regular greeting:

"How are my faithful subjects to-day?"

One or two of the boys answered, but without spirit. When the coach and the captain came closer all efforts at cheerfulness had worn themselves out.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Any more of the 'Varsity fellows around?" asked Jenkins.

Curtis answered. "Hardy's in the locker room."

"Come along. I want to talk to you."

The coach walked toward the locker room. The boys stared at each other a moment, and then followed wonderingly. Several of the minor candidates who had arrived behind the coach trailed after. At the locker room door Captain Redway good-naturedly halted them.

"Just a minute, fellows," he called. "The coach wants to talk to the 'Varsity."

"But we want to get into uniform," protested one of the candidates.

"There'll be no practice to-day," Redway replied.

No practice! The 'Varsity stared again.

"Huh!" muttered Kennedy. "Something is the matter."

They found Hardy, the center fielder, in the room, buttoning his baseball shirt. He paused as the doleful procession entered.

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

"What's the sad news?" he demanded.

Jenkins closed the door. "Redway has resigned," he said.

It is a serious thing to lose a tried and true captain just as the training season starts. Hardy's hands dropped to his sides. The rest of the fellows fell back a step. After a moment a sigh ran from boy to boy.

Redway always went behind the bat when Kennedy pitched. Now Kennedy was the first to find his voice.

"Oh, come, now, Redway—"

The captain shook his head. "I'm sorry. It's a case of must. Jenkins tried to talk me into holding on. It's impossible."

"But the nine—" began Kennedy.

"This is of more importance than the nine," the captain answered.

One or two of the fellows appeared scandalized. Kennedy swallowed hard. He knew Redway. If the captain said this unknown something was of more importance than St. Mary's, it must be so.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"What is it?" he asked.

"Tell them," ordered Jenkins. "They elected you; they have a right to know why you must quit."

"I received a letter from my father," Redway began hesitatingly. "He— Well, his business has about failed, and he's not well."

"You're not leaving?" cried Bartley.

"Not yet, though this will probably be my last year. My father suggests that I get all I can from what's left of the term. He doesn't object to my playing ball, but he wants me to quit as captain. He says that the time I give to the captain's duties must be given to study. He's right, of course."

"It's mighty tough," growled Kennedy sympathetically.

"It might be worse," said Redway with a brave attempt at a smile.

The coach coughed. Even the fellows were not deceived. They crowded around the captain with encouragement.

"You'll be back next year, Redway."

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

"Certainly. Couldn't lose you, old man."

"Why, Rockton would be willing to burn down a building or two if she thought you were really leaving."

Redway's eyes were moist. "I guess I know how you feel, fellows."

"I suppose we must elect a new captain," said a brisk voice.

The 'Varsity players turned suddenly. Mellen, the second baseman, was standing off to one side.

"You needn't be in such a smashing hurry about it," snapped Kennedy.

"We must have a captain," Mellen insisted. "That's what you brought us here for, wasn't it, Jenkins?"

The coach was frowning. The nine could not help seeing it.

"Yes," he answered sharply; "but I've changed my mind. Kennedy is right. There's no need of great hurry; to-morrow will do." Unconsciously the coach's hand went out and rested on Redway's shoulder. "It will give you

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

fellows a chance to think over who you want."

"What time to-morrow?" asked Mellen.

"Will five o'clock in the morning be early enough for you?"

The second baseman flushed. "I'm not trying to hurry this."

The coach nodded. "I understand. How about noon to-morrow at Redway's room? It shouldn't take us more than five minutes. Three or four of the 'Varsity are absent. Let them know, too."

The coach opened the locker room door and passed out, followed by Redway. They found more than a dozen of the candidates waiting anxiously, and wondering at the strange doings. As Jenkins passed, they hurried for the room. A few quick words told them that Redway had resigned. They started after him, for to their minds the captain of the nine was a greater person than the President of the United States. Then Curtis called:

"A big cheer for Redway, fellows; all together now."

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

The cheer boomed and rattled. It was the last sound Redway and Jenkins heard as they left the gym.

"I guess Mellen wants my place," said the captain when they were outside.

There was no complaint in his voice, but the coach fell to frowning.

"This comes at a bad time," he said. "There's generally some rivalry, but when the election is held right after the big game it gives all disappointments a chance to heal before the summer vacation is over. If there's a fight in this election, it may produce bitterness in the heart of the season."

"If I could stick it out, Jenkins—"

"I know; you'd stay with me if you had half a chance. I'm not finding fault."

"Who do you think they'll pick?"

"I don't know. Mellen's been on the 'Varsity a long time. We'll—that is, the athletic committee and I—will have to make the best of it. We can't dictate and perhaps have a row."

"What will you do?"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“We must give the nine its head and accept the captain the fellows pick.”

They walked a short distance in silence. The coach sighed:

“I hope we’ll have no trouble.”

Back in the locker room, Mellen was dressing serenely. If the truth must be told Redway’s misfortunes did not trouble him overmuch. Neither did he concern himself with the fact that Kennedy and some of the other fellows had cast black looks in his direction.

Redway was quitting. To the second baseman that was all that mattered. He could see no reason why he should not be given the captain’s place. True, he had been disappointed when Jenkins had failed to hold the election at once, but that was past. What difference would a few hours make?

“I graduate in June,” he told himself. “I’ve played on the nine for three years. Why shouldn’t I be captain?”

He trudged back to Winslow Hall, the dormitory building, at peace with all the world.

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

Part of the afternoon he studied. The outdoors kept calling him. At last he slipped on a light overcoat, for it was still chilly by day and cold by night, and it would be two or three weeks before the baseball candidates would get their first open-air practice on St. Mary's field.

On the stairs he met Bruce, the captain of the eleven.

"Has Redway quit?" asked the hero of many a gridiron battle.

Mellen nodded. "We elect a new captain tomorrow."

"Somebody was telling me they'll elect Bartley captain," said Bruce.

The information hit Mellen with the force of a blow, and made him gasp. Then his anger flared up. He called himself a fool for not having announced his candidacy. The fellows probably didn't know he wanted the honor. A few hours before he couldn't see how they could give it to anybody else; now, he was about to cast dignity aside and ask for it.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Kennedy was the first boy he met. "I'm out for captain," he announced.

"So is Bartley," said the pitcher.

"But—"

"I'm with Bartley, Mellen."

Then the second baseman remembered. Kennedy and Bartley were room-mates.

"You'll be in a nice little minority," he scowled, and walked away.

Next he met Curtis, the third baseman. "I'm a candidate," he said.

"For what?" asked Curtis.

For what? The question came as a great surprise.

"Why, for captain."

Curtis shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mellen; I'm for Bartley."

The second baseman's face had lost some of its ruddy color. Two votes against him already, and no knowing how the other fellows stood.

"Didn't you room with Bartley at one time?" he asked questioningly.

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

"Yes; freshman year. That was before my brother entered."

"Ah!" Mellen's face cleared a bit. "It's lucky for me," he added, "that Bartley hasn't roomed with the whole 'Varsity."

"Ssh!" soothed Curtis. "Somebody'll hear you and think you're a sorehead."

Mellen stalked off angrily. He'd see what some of the others—fellows who had not roomed with Bartley—had to say about it. If he could find some of the old-timers, boys who had made the nine the three years he had played—

"O Kaufman!" he called joyously. "You're just the chap I want."

The giant first baseman halted. When Mellen came alongside, he started off again.

"Come on," he invited.

"Where to?" asked Mellen.

"Bartley's room. They'll elect him captain to-morrow."

"Will—will you vote for him?"

"Yes, sir," said Kaufman decidedly.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Mellen's heart sank. Yet he made one more effort.

"I—I thought I'd become a candidate, Kaufman."

"Don't!" said the first baseman. "You wouldn't have a chance."

"But a pitcher for captain? Who ever heard of that?"

"It can be done," said Kaufman uneasily. "I guess Jenkins won't object."

That last sentence stuck in Mellen's mind. Finally he went to Jenkins's room.

"Heard about Bartley?" he asked.

"What about him?" demanded the coach anxiously. "Hurt his arm?"

"No; they're going to elect him captain."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. I've spoken to Kennedy, Curtis and Kaufman."

The coach came out of his chair and paced across the room. Mellen could see that he was worried.

"What good is a pitcher-captain?" the boy



"You wouldn't have a chance."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

demanded. "A captain takes charge of the players on the field. A pitcher doesn't work in every game. If Bartley is elected the nine will have a captain on the field only when Bartley pitches."

The coach nodded. He knew; it was the argument that had been running through his mind before the second baseman spoke. A pitcher for captain—he thought it the height of folly. But what could he do? Put his foot down and perhaps antagonize almost the entire 'Varsity! There would be no time for the boys to forget his interference; they were already in training.

Turning suddenly, he saw Mellen watching him and smiling a little, too.

"Well!" he snapped.

"You'll stop it, of course!"

"Why?"

"Why? A pitcher for captain? Who ever heard of it?"

Jenkins hadn't. But a united 'Varsity was of more importance to him just now than the

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

question of captain. It had begun to dawn on him that Murray caught Bartley, and that Redway went behind the bat only when Kennedy worked. When Bartley wasn't pitching Redway would catch, and could then, perhaps, run the nine. In that way the 'Varsity could satisfy itself by electing Bartley, and—

"A pitcher for captain," said Mellen again.

"I won't interfere," cried the coach.

"But—"

Jenkins came closer. "You're looking for the place, aren't you, Mellen?"

"Why, I—I—"

"Yes, or no?"

"Y—yes."

"Ah! I won't interfere. Besides, you know Redway didn't catch all the games."

"He caught the big ones."

"Bartley may pitch all the big ones."

"But it's different, Jenkins. A captain must worry about every member of the nine. A pitcher should worry only about his arm. You

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

know that, Jenkins. Suppose Bartley worries himself out of condition—”

“We’ll have to take those chances,” sighed Jenkins. And then, afraid that Mellen might discover the fear behind that sigh, he ended the interview. At the door he slapped the boy’s shoulders.

“I hear you were playing great ball to-day before I arrived. Bartley told me. He thinks you’re a great second baseman.”

“We practiced a while,” said the boy listlessly.

“Come!” called the coach. “I have my reasons for letting them elect Bartley.”

“They ought to be pretty good ones,” the boy flung back, and the coach sighed again and closed the door.

“Trouble already,” he muttered. “Am I doing the right thing in allowing them to pick a pitcher for captain? If it interferes with his pitching, he may have to resign. If he does, I’ll name the next captain. No more elections this year, thank you.”

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

Jenkins hoped that the praise Bartley had given Mellen's work would soothe the second baseman. It didn't. That night Mellen tried three more of the fellows. They all declared in favor of Bartley.

Long before the 'Varsity players gathered in Redway's room the following day, Mellen knew that Kaufman was right—that he didn't have a chance.

"And for three years," he said in disappointment, "I've given St. Mary's my best. This is only Bartley's second year. Aside from pitching what does he know about baseball?"

The election itself was quickly over. Curtis nominated the star pitcher, and Hardy seconded the motion.

"Any further nominations?" asked Redway. There was no answer.

"Let's make it unanimous!" yelled Kaufman.

The fellows cheered their willingness and stamped their feet. Then they noticed that

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Bartley was standing. The clamor died away at once.

"Just a minute, fellows," said the star pitcher. "You know that the freshman and sophomore classes get out a weekly, and that I'm the editor of *The Eagle*. If I become captain, it means that I must stop my work on *The Eagle*. Therefore, I'll accept the captaincy only on one condition."

"And that is?" Kaufman asked.

Mellen was already moving toward the door. Now he stopped and listened.

"That Redway give me all the help he can," answered Bartley.

It was, to Mellen, a confession that the star pitcher was unfit for the place. He waited for the storm to break now that the fellows must surely see their mistake. Instead, Redway promised to do what he could, and the 'Varsity cheered again.

The second baseman once more moved toward the door. His going seemed to be unnoticed.

## THE NEW CAPTAIN

"A fine lemon we've picked," he grunted.

His voice had been low, but a quick footstep sounded behind him and a hand touched his arm.

"What was that, Mellen?"

It was Jenkins's voice, softly pitched. The boy swallowed hard.

"Nothing," he said; "just nothing."

"Ah!" breathed the coach. "That's better."

## CHAPTER II

### A FIRM STAND

JENKINS, the coach, scored every game played by his nine, or had some person score it for him. Jenkins was a man who kept the fielding and the batting averages of all his boys. And these box scores showed that not only was Samuel Mellen a star second baseman, but that he could also hit like a house afire.

After the election, and while the 'Varsity players were in classes, Jenkins returned to his rooms. Slowly he pulled down the battered score book, and then the other volume in which were recorded the grand individual averages. St. Mary's boys called these books "the grand old dope."

Mellen had put in three years on the 'Varsity. As though he did not know it to the last

## A FIRM STAND

decimal, Jenkins went over the second baseman's record. In the end, he closed the book and leaned back wearily.

"I hope he doesn't lose his head," he sighed. "Why didn't they elect him instead of Bartley? Some day, I suppose, I'll go through a season without trouble—and then I'll die of stagnation."

The coach awaited that afternoon's practice not without some uneasiness. How would the boys take Bartley? Would they give him the same loyal support they had given Redway? It was one thing to elect a fellow; it was another thing to obey his orders.

Jenkins knew that every boy has some definite idea as to how baseball should be played. What were Bartley's ideas? The new captain would probably talk to the fellows that afternoon. Would he put his foot in it? Jenkins found himself wishing that he could have a few words with the star pitcher before he addressed the candidates. Then he shook his head angrily.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"What's the use?" he grumbled. "If he's going to make a mess of it, he might just as well do it now, as later."

That afternoon most of the candidates were in locker room or cage when Bartley arrived. The squad raised a cheer. Redway came over and gripped the new captain's hand.

"Good luck," he said earnestly.

While Bartley got into uniform the 'Varsity players stuck to the locker room, knowing, from experience, what was to come. Out in the cage the untried candidates tossed a dozen baseballs from boy to boy. Mellen, off to one side, smiled wisely.

"Now," he said, "let's see what reforms the new captain will inaugurate."

With Bartley in the center the 'Varsity finally went forth to the cage. Curtis and Kennedy lifted their strong, young voices:

"This way, fellows; this way."

The candidates came crowding. Jenkins, standing behind the locker room door, could hear it all, but could not be seen.

## A FIRM STAND

"Fellows," said Bartley with a smile, "let us get one thing straightened out right at the start. I don't profess to know it all. But I do know this: we want a winning nine. Don't we?"

"We do," yelled the boys.

"And you'll help me form that winning nine, won't you?"

"Surest thing you know," called Kaufman slangily.

"That's fine. But unless you fellows pitch in and help me, I'm powerless. We must all work together. This is going to be a hard season. Last year Rockton had four freshmen on her nine; this spring those freshmen are seasoned. So Rockton is stronger. We must grit our teeth and go in to win, and we must start right now."

"Start it is," yelled the candidates.

"Just say the word," called Murray, the substitute catcher.

"I'll say the first word in a minute," Bartley went on. "I want this understood, though;

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

I'll ask no fellow to do what I will not do myself. The thing I must insist on is that every candidate appear for practice. No skipping the work. Understand that. We want every player in condition. If you cut practice, you're not getting into your best condition, and you're not fair with St. Mary's. So I want you all out every afternoon."

Mellen, standing on the outskirts of the circle about the captain, cleared his throat noisily. The boys turned toward the sound.

"That doesn't mean me?" questioned the second baseman confidently.

Behind the locker room door Jenkins held his breath.

"I'm afraid it does," Bartley smiled. "You're so good that I want to have you at your best. We'd be in a bad way if you weren't in shape."

"But when Redway was captain—" Mellen began.

"He's not captain now," cut in Curtis.

"Oh, I know that," murmured the second

## A FIRM STAND

baseman. "But when he was, I didn't have to come out every day."

Redway started to say something, but Bartley checked him.

"I know, Mellen." The captain was still smiling. "Things are different now."

"They certainly are," Mellen agreed, and off to the left a boy snickered.

The second baseman saw Redway glaring angrily. Suddenly he searched the crowd. Was the coach there? Had the coach heard him? He did not see Jenkins, and breathed easier.

Behind the door the coach shook his head gloomily. "Mellen's sore," he muttered. "I knew there'd be trouble."

But Jenkins said nothing to Bartley about the scene, and the captain made no complaint. From this the coach drew a grain of comfort. It meant that the new captain would not be running to him with a daily list of woes.

Jenkins, though, did not try to deceive himself. He was sure that Mellen would cut practice, if for no other reason than to see if Bart-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ley would dare discipline him: The coach thought, at first, of going to the second baseman and warning him to obey; but later, he decided that this would not do at all. It would advertise to Mellen that the captain did not have the confidence of the school coach.

Then, later, Jenkins heard that after the day's practice Redway and Mellen had had a row. The coach sent for his star catcher.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, "by fighting with Mellen? Want to stir up trouble?"

"There was no fight," said Redway easily.

"I heard—"

"I can't help what you heard. There was no fight. I merely told Mellen not to monkey with Bartley, or he'd think he'd been caressed by a steam roller."

The coach bit his lips. Redway walked closer to the man.

"Make no mistake, Jenkins," he cried. "This captain of ours will stand for no foolishness. If I were you I'd back him up."

## A FIRM STAND

"I'll let you know when I need advice," snapped the coach.

But after the catcher left, he paced the room with worried steps. Were some of the fellows guessing that he didn't know how to face the situation if trouble started?

Next day, the candidates had been at work in the cage almost an hour before Jenkins appeared. The coach did not see Mellen working with the infielders. Was the second baseman in the locker room?

"Where's Mellen?" he asked carelessly. "I have something to tell him."

"He hasn't reported yet," Bartley replied.

There was just a trace of steel in the captain's voice. Jenkins shrugged his shoulders.

"Send him to me when he comes in," he said; but he knew that the second baseman would not appear—not that day.

Jenkins made it a point to keep in close touch with the campus. As a result he knew before going to bed that night that the students were talking about the new captain's order and the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

manner in which Mellen, the star second baseman, had ignored it.

The coach knew school sentiment almost as well as he knew baseball. He did not have to be told that once the tongue of the campus took to wagging, things were sure to happen quickly.

"No chance of peace," he groaned. "It's a show-down now between Mellen and Bartley."

Next afternoon he reached the gym early. If the captain and the star infielder came together, he wanted to be there when it happened.

He found several of his 'Varsity infielders practicing on the cage diamond. Off to one side Bartley was pitching to Murray, and Kennedy, his other pitching star, was throwing to Redway. Then Mellen came in.

Cheerily calling greetings, the boy passed to the locker room. Soon he came forth in uniform. Dixon, a freshman, was playing second base. Mellen walked out on the diamond.

"I'll play a while, Larry, if you don't mind," he called.



"'You can't play on the diamond to-day.'"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Dixon, after the manner of freshmen, was awed by the sight of the school star.

"Certainly," he agreed readily, and walked toward the foul lines.

Jenkins glanced over at Bartley. So did Redway and most of the 'Varsity players.

A candidate, batting the ball from the plate, lifted his voice:

"Here you go, Mellen."

"Let it come," shouted the second baseman.

Mellen trapped a sizzling "grass cutter," and shot the ball to Kaufman. As he swung around after making the throw, he saw Bartley coming toward him. He also noticed that the coach was crowding closer.

"You can't play on the diamond to-day," said the captain lightly.

Mellen straightened up. "And why not?"

"I'm afraid it will stiffen your muscles."

"How?"

"Well, you didn't get any practice yesterday. It is so early in the season that a day's rest softens the muscles a bit. If you tried fast

## A FIRM STAND

infield work to-day, to-morrow you wouldn't be able to throw a ball. I can't take chances, Mellen. You're too good a second baseman."

"But—"

"I know. You're enthusiastic, and anxious to play. I can't risk it."

"Is there anything I can do to-day?" demanded Mellen angrily.

"Certainly," agreed Bartley. "You must get some work. Just throw a ball around a little—out past the foul lines. It will limber up your arm. I guess you'll be able to play on the diamond to-morrow."

It was so smoothly done that Mellen was helpless. He had expected a quarrel that would show up the captain in a sorry light before the fellows. Instead, he received soft words and a friendly smile. Underneath the gentleness, though, he could feel the iron. He was being punished; and he would play on the infield to-morrow because he had come out for practice to-day.

Of a sudden, he turned defiantly, as though

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

to return to his place. Then he heard Bartley's voice:

"Come out here, Dixon. Let's see how you shape up."

Mellen slowly left the diamond. To stay there, with another player ordered out to take his place, would be to invite an open order to stand aside.

To the second baseman the afternoon was long—fearfully long. While the infielders scurried about inside and outside the base paths, and while the cage echoed to the ring of wood against leather, he kept tossing a ball to a player who had gone too strong at the start, and who was now wearily working the kinks out of tortured muscles. He—the star—exiled from his position of glory—

"That's all for to-day," called the coach.

The boy delayed until he had Jenkins alone. Then he burst forth into protest.

"Bartley was pounding me to-day," he cried. "He knew there was no chance of my muscles stiffening."

## A FIRM STAND

The coach wet his lips. "You heard the order?"

"Yes. But Redway—"

"Redway is no longer the captain."

"But my work has always been all right, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then why can't I go on as I did before?"

The conversation was taking a turn the coach did not like. "We won't argue it," he said brusquely.

"I'll tell you this: I've been playing 'Varsity ball long enough to know how much work I need to keep in condition, and I'm only going to take that much."

Mellen stalked away. The coach frowned. At any other time he would have brought the second baseman up with a round turn. But now he was loaded with a captain who was a demon pitcher, but a vast uncertainty as a commander. In addition to this could he antagonize his star infielder? He was expected to maintain discipline, but the athletic commit-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

tee that engaged him and fixed his salary also expected victories.

He could understand why Bartley had given the order that had kicked up the fuss. It was the pitcher's first experience as a captain. He was taking no chances. Yet the coach felt that if there were some way in which Bartley could hold his dignity and yet let up on Mellen, that the time to let up had come. In the locker room, he drew the captain to one side.

"Come to my rooms to-night," he ordered.

Darkness brought an overcast sky; and a soaking rain was falling when Bartley tramped across the campus to Jenkins's lodgings.

"About Mellen—" began the coach, and stopped. He saw the captain's jaw squaring.

"Well?" asked the boy.

Jenkins stood up as though he were tired. He pulled down the books the school called "the grand old dope."

"Mellen has played on the 'Varsity three years," he said. "I want to show you his record. Never batted less than .298. Last year

## A FIRM STAND

he punished the ball for a percentage of .334."

The captain accepted this in silence.

"His fielding has been good, too," the coach went on. "Here, look at the figures. Is there another infielder with that record?"

Still the captain said not a word.

"Look at this, too," cried the coach nervously. "Look over the box scores of some of the games. He doesn't go to pieces in a pinch. Here, take the score book. Look it over."

Bartley did not take the book. Instead, he spoke slowly. "Well?"

"He's sulking. He's sore because—because of what happened to-day."

"He knew the order."

"I know, but—"

The captain turned away. The rain was beating with a rat-tat-tat on the window panes.

"Jenkins," he cried suddenly, "Mellen is showing plainly that he doesn't think I'll make good. I must use an iron hand in this—or quit. If you think I'm hurting the chances of

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

the nine, I'll—I'll quit this minute. Make Mellen the captain. I'll work under him as hard as I worked under Redway. But while I'm captain Mellen will toe the mark with the others."

The coach turned in his chair until his back was toward the pitcher. Finally he faced about again, picked up the record books and put them in their places.

"I'll sign a resignation—"

"Stop!" Jenkins commanded. "You'll do nothing of the kind. Any boy with the spirit to make such an unselfish offer can captain all the ball teams I'll ever coach."

After Bartley had gone, after his footsteps had died away, the coach again took down the score books.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "This may make for all kinds of trouble, but after he offered to quit for Mellen—"

The coach went to the window and looked out. The rain had stopped. He reached for his hat, turned out the light and left the place.

## A FIRM STAND

Mellen was studying when his room door opened. Looking up, he saw Jenkins and sprang to his feet.

"I need not report every day?" he questioned.

"You're wrong; you must report. Hold on, there; don't tell me what happened when Redway was captain. I've heard all that before."

The second baseman took a deep breath.  
"Your orders, Jenkins?"

"Bartley's orders," said the coach icily.

## CHAPTER III

### THE THREAT

**A**FTER the coach had gone, Mellen walked over to the door and kicked it shut.

"That's what I get," he frowned, "for being a candidate for captain."

Like many other boys, the second baseman could not see his own faults. He forgot that he had deliberately broken a training rule for no other reason than to test the weight of the captain's authority. Now that he found the authority heavy enough to bruise his pride, he took refuge in the thought that his present plight came because he had aspired to the leadership.

"And Jenkins lets him do it," he groaned.

Mellen remembered that the coach had looked worried when he had complained of Bartley's

## THE THREAT

treatment. Yet, a few minutes ago, Jenkins had told him that he would have to obey. There was no hesitancy in the coach's voice, either. What had wrought this change?

"Bartley, of course," Mellen decided. "Who else? If I hadn't been a candidate for cap—"

The second baseman stopped abruptly. It occurred to him that he might have one sympathizer at St. Mary's. Redway, his former captain, had never insisted that he appear each afternoon during the preliminary practice. The catcher, though he had warned him to obey Bartley, would probably understand how he felt. Then again, Redway was in high favor with Jenkins. Perhaps the former captain would be able to call the coach off this wild plan to enforce Bartley's wilder order.

Mellen stalked off to Redway's room. The catcher turned inquiring eyes on his visitor.

"Somebody leave you a fortune?" he asked politely.

"No," snapped Mellen; "why?"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“You look so cheerful.”

“I ought to feel cheerful,” growled the second baseman. “I don’t know how lucky I am. Soon I’ll be told to use three spoons with my soup and to chew my food with my left teeth.”

Redway grinned. “That would be serious, wouldn’t it? Well, what’s up?”

“Nothing,” said Mellen. “Just a little order from a green captain that I shall dash out each afternoon, bow three times, beg pardon for living and then practice. That’s all.”

The grin had gone from Redway’s face. “Forget it,” he recommended.

“Forget it!” screeched Mellen. “You tell me to forget it!”

“Certainly. Why not?”

“But you never ordered me to turn out that way.”

“True,” agreed Redway. “But the fellow who’s been elected captain after the big game, can take the summer to map out his campaign. It’s different with the fellow who’s tossed into the job at the last minute. Bartley can’t take

## THE THREAT

chances. Suppose you had been elected. How many fellows would you have let cut practice?"

"Why," stammered the second baseman, "I—I—"

"Exactly," cried the captain; "that's the answer. You'd have been new at the duty, and in your efforts to turn out a winning nine you'd have made every candidate report. You'd report, too, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"Then why not report now without fuss and feathers? Why not do as much for St. Mary's as you'd do for yourself as captain?"

That last shot hurt, and Mellen showed its effects.

"I didn't come here for a lecture," he flared; but Redway silenced him with a scowl.

"You're getting what's coming to you," said the catcher. "Don't forget that I'm acting captain. You heard Bartley ask me to help him. And if I were you, I wouldn't go around harping on that practice refrain—Bartley might become angry and take away the harp."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Bartley—” scoffed the second baseman.

“That will be about all from you,” Redway hinted. Mellen knew from experience that when the catcher’s voice grew quiet, it was time to get into the cyclone cellar. He had not quite lost his fear of his former captain. Without another word, he left the room.

“My friend, Redway,” he stormed on his way up the stairs. “Bah!”

“Bah, bah, black sheep,” added a group of voices, and Mellen, engrossed in his troubles, awoke to the fact that he had been talking aloud. His face flushed foolishly, and he hurried past the fellows who grinned at him.

Though Jenkins and Redway had both disappointed him, the second baseman still cherished one belief. He was ready to admit that Bartley was a strong, heady pitcher, but deep in his heart he was sure that the captain did not have the knowledge to direct team work. What did Bartley know about strategic play? What did he know about inside baseball?

“Why,” said Mellen, “as soon as he starts

## THE THREAT

to develop a defense, he'll be a joke." He found a deal of comfort in that thought.

The star infielder did not make the mistake next afternoon of keeping away from the cage.



" ' Bah, bah, black sheep! ' "

He came out early, and took his place on the diamond with the 'Varsity infielders. Yet he was ill at ease. Would he be ordered off again?

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

After a while he saw Bartley come from the locker room. The captain nodded to him as though nothing had happened, and turned to direct the work of some of the outfielders. Mellen pounded his glove and danced a bit. So he wouldn't be taken out to-day!

"This way," he called. "Let it come, son."

The ball bounded toward him and splashed through his hands.

"Accidents will happen," Kaufman encouraged.

"Get the next one," chanted Curtis; "get the next one."

Mellen frowned. "Once more," he called.

Again the white leather came toward him. This time, bent low, he froze to it, and tossed to Kaufman. In an instant the ball was streaking around the four corners of the diamond.

"Fine work," came Bartley's voice.

"A lot he knows about it," sneered the second baseman in an undertone.

After the practice, while joyous, young bod-

## THE THREAT

ies were gurgling under the streaming showers, Jenkins openly praised the work of the 'Varsity infield.

"Hot stuff!" he said. "You fellows are the real fifty-seven varieties of a stone wall. The pitchers will have an easy time of it if you hit as well as you field."

"Just watch us when we get started," promised Curtis.

"We'll kill the ball," Kaufman added.

The second baseman, the best hitter in the infield, had not said a word. Bartley turned toward him.

"How about you, Mellen?"

"Oh, I'll be there," said the star infielder carelessly.

"I hope so," smiled the captain. "I've been looking over Jenkins's records. Your hitting has won a lot of games for us."

"A few," Mellen agreed, and Jenkins felt as though he would have liked to choke him.

Leaving the gym, Mellen struck out for an unfrequented street. He wanted to be alone so

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

that he could think. So the records showed that his hitting had won many games for the blue and gold! How many games, according to Jenkins's "grand old dope" had his fielding saved? And yet they had elected Bartley captain.

The germ of a nasty idea was developing in the second baseman's brain. He had not yet given up hope of winning the place Bartley now filled. If it could be shown that the captain was lacking, wouldn't there be a rebellion? Not a troublesome refusal to obey orders, but a showing that the players had lost confidence in their leader—an undercurrent of feeling that Bartley could not help but feel.

What would then happen? Wouldn't the captain, to keep the nine from losing heart, be forced to resign?

Mellen knew better than to belittle the star pitcher's efforts to last year's 'Varsity players. However, there were more than thirty minor candidates. They had heard his work praised—he had seen their eyes open with admiration.

## THE THREAT

These candidates would accept what he chose to tell them.

It did not occur to the infielder that if they took his stories to heart, it would be because they did not know Bartley. The 'Varsity did know the star pitcher—and Mellen would not carry his tales there.

So the second baseman began to mingle a great deal with the minor candidates. They accepted him as a brother, for he was the first 'Varsity star who had given them more than passing notice. *He* wasn't swell-headed; *he* wasn't chesty. He was just one good fellow. He didn't think he was too big to chum with them.

Curtis, the third baseman, was the first to notice Mellen's activity. He hurried to Kennedy, Bartley's room-mate.

"Why is Mellen so friendly with the outcasts?" he demanded, using a term that the 'Varsity always applied to the second string fellows.

"I haven't noticed it," replied Kennedy.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"I have," said Curtis. "Just give Bartley a hint, will you—and the coach, too?"

"Why? What's wrong?"

"I had a little talk with Mellen before we elected Bartley captain. He isn't strong for Bartley."

Kennedy's eyes narrowed. "I'll tell Jenkins."

"And Bartley?" Curtis demanded.

"And Bartley," Kennedy promised.

That night, he told Bartley of the talk with Curtis.

"Well," asked the captain, "what about it? Can't Mellen talk to the outcasts?"

"Certainly. But Curtis didn't like the way Mellen spoke to him prior to the election."

"What was it Mellen said?"

"Curtis didn't tell me."

Bartley laughed. "Ned," he said, "you and Curt ought to start a detective agency. You're the most suspicious couple I ever met."

"Nevertheless," insisted Kennedy doggedly,

## THE THREAT

"it's strange that Mellen should become so thick with the outcasts."

The captain didn't reply to this; and after a while Kennedy went off, and, as he later told Curtis, "put a flea in Jenkins's ear."

Though Bartley had laughed at Curtis's fears, he soon found that the second string fellows received his orders with sarcastic nudges. Now and then giggles of laughter greeted his advice. Soon he found his thoughts going back quite often to the third baseman's warning.

"Mellen's still pretty thick with the outcasts," Kennedy observed one night.

"Is he?" asked Bartley absently. His manner was indifferent, but his heart was beating with leaden thumps. So his room-mate had observed the behavior of the second string fellows. Had Jenkins noticed it?

Next day, after the 'Varsity had practiced a while, Bartley ordered the minor outfield candidates to throw the ball, each time it was batted, back to the plate on a line. His object

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

was to test out the arms of the candidates. They strolled out to their places with maddening slowness.

Bartley glanced at Jenkins, and saw that the coach had been watching him. Not long afterwards, the captain saw Kennedy and Jenkins whispering together. Then he heard the man's voice:

"It's his fight, Kennedy."

Without being told, Bartley knew what was passing through the coach's mind. If Jenkins interfered, it would be a sign that the captain was not able to handle the situation himself. If he didn't take a hand—

"Curtis was right," Bartley muttered.

When the practice came to an end, he slipped back to Winslow Hall. That night Kennedy found him morbid and silent. But Kennedy knew the signs, and hastened, before long, to Curtis's room.

"He's thinking it out," he exploded. "Tomorrow he'll declare war—or he won't."

Next day, though the captain came early to

## THE THREAT

the cage, the coach was there ahead of him. In the locker room 'Varsity fellows were hurrying into uniform.

"Take your time," Bartley advised. "The scrub gets first crack to-day."

Ten minutes later the captain was out in the cage with the second string infield candidates around him.

"Take the diamond," he ordered; "all of you. After each stop, throw to first base without straightening up. There's only one first base candidate among you, so there'll be no mixup at that corner. Throw from whatever position you're in when the ball comes to you, and throw quickly."

Half a dozen infield candidates started briskly for the diamond. The others—seven all told—smiled knowingly and lagged behind.

Bartley, over his shoulder, saw Jenkins staring. The captain, running out to the foul line, stopped the seven.

"There's been enough of this," he said quietly.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Enough of what?” asked a voice in a tone that feigned surprise.

“You fellows know what I’m talking about. You can quit—all of you.” Then, as they hesitated: “You heard me, didn’t you? You’re dismissed.”

Bartley could see the ’Varsity fellows coming out from the locker room, and then breaking into a run. He glanced back, but Jenkins was now looking the other way. The captain did not know what the next few minutes would bring, but he had made his choice.

Somewhat bewildered, the seven candidates were moving off. Dixon, the freshman second base candidate, retreated a few steps, stopped and then came back.

“I thought you were a joke,” he said. “I guess I was wrong.”

Bartley came forward. “You mean that, Dixon?” he asked in a low voice.

“Yes.”

“Sure you mean that?”

“Yes.”

## THE THREAT

The captain smiled. "That dismissal doesn't hold on your case. Report to-morrow."

"Now, look here," cried Dixon. "I'm not begging, but—"



"I must chase that captain, or that captain will chase me."

"I know," said Bartley. "Your name's Larry, isn't it? Report to-morrow, Larry."

The captain, as he turned away, could see

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

three faces. Curtis and Kennedy were grinning cheerfully; Mellen was frowning, and plucking at the stoutly-stitched fingers of his fielding glove.

Bartley, anxious to work out his arm, called Redway. The catcher, running to him, patted his back.

“Good work, old man.”

“I had to do it,” said the captain regretfully.

“You should have fired one or two more,” Redway hinted.

Back near the foul line Mellen was still frowning. Jenkins started to coach the boys working on the infield. The second baseman strolled toward the man.

“Some whirlwind captain,” he remarked.

“Some aggressive captain,” said the coach. “And if there should be any more trouble it wouldn’t surprise me if some of the ‘Varsity were to go, too.”

“How many of the ‘Varsity?” asked the boy slowly.

“One—or more,” said Jenkins.

## THE THREAT

Mellen walked away. His glove fell to the floor, and he stooped to pick it up.

"I must chase that captain," he said bitterly, "or that captain will chase me."

## CHAPTER IV

### INSIDE BASEBALL

MELLEN played that afternoon like a boy in a dream. Unreal balls came to him, and he made unreal catches and unreal throws. Yet he was conscious of a change in the cage—he could feel it. The second string fellows obeyed the captain's orders with eagerness, and even the 'Varsity responded with additional promptness.

The coach, in school athletics, is master even of the captain. Never in the history of St. Mary's had a captain dared to make such a wholesale dismissal without first consulting the coach. But these were extraordinary times. Bartley, partly guessing the reason why, had known that Jenkins was leaving him to fight his own way out, and he fought without first inquiring what Jenkins thought of his plans.

## INSIDE BASEBALL

To Mellen, in the moments when his head cleared, that afternoon's work smacked of disaster. Here was an untried captain riding roughshod. If he was strong enough to behead the second string fellows, might he not be powerful enough to discipline one Mellen, star infielder?

It occurred to him, too, after a while, that perhaps Jenkins, when the practice was over, would quietly read the riot act to the captain, and order him to rescind his order of expulsion. During the work that same thought came more than once to Bartley. When the fellows scampered at last for the locker room, he walked over to the coach. Jenkins could plainly see the question in his eyes.

"A trying afternoon, Bartley, eh?"

The boy nodded, and still asked the question with his eyes.

Suddenly Jenkins put out his hand and gave the arm of his star pitcher a gentle, reassuring squeeze. Not a word was spoken; but the fear went out of the captain's eyes.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"I'm going to make a winning nine out of this, Jenkins."

"I know you will," said the coach, even though he didn't know any such thing.

Mellen, watching from afar, saw it all and understood.

"Napoleon Bartley!" he growled. "Well, I guess it's up to me to start a Waterloo. I'll be Wellington Mellen."

The second baseman gave not a thought to the fellows who had been dismissed from the nine for foolishly following his lead. They, however, had not forgotten him. When he came out to the street, he found them grouped about the door.

"What are you going to do for us?" they asked.

"About what?" demanded Mellen.

"About our suspension."

"Why should I do anything for you?"

"Why?" echoed a voice. "Didn't you get us into this?"

"I did not," replied the second baseman in



"'What are you going to do for us?'"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

a shocked tone. "What did I have to do with it?"

Angry, outraged, they crowded around the boy who had been their idol, and besieged him with questions.

"Didn't you tell us that he was a joke?"

"Didn't you say he didn't have nerve enough to make faces at himself?"

"What did you have to do with it?"

"What do you think we are? Lunatics?"

Their voices had almost become shouts. Mellen shook his fists fearfully.

"Keep still. Not so loud. Do you want to be heard all over the village?"

"Afraid Jenkins or Bartley will hear us?" demanded a voice shrewdly.

"He isn't afraid of Bartley," jeered another voice. "Not a bit of it."

Inside the building the second baseman could hear the fellows hurrying to the door. It would never do to be found mixed up in this kind of row. Using his elbows and his shoulders, he fought free of the crowd, and started

## INSIDE BASEBALL

for the campus at a rapid pace. Over his shoulder he saw the door open; Kennedy, Curtis and half a dozen more candidates bustled out. He lengthened his stride, turned a corner, and then ran.

"Running away," he grunted. "I'll make you pay for this, Bartley."

Back outside the gym the six dismissed candidates assured Kennedy and Curtis that there was no need for calling the police, and then drew off to discuss their sorry plight. They saw only one ray of hope—an appeal to the coach. When Jenkins came from the gym, they surrounded him, but he brushed them aside.

"For my part," he said, "St. Mary's can well do without the fellows that try to make trouble. I won't help you. If Bartley wants to take you back, that's his lookout. Personally, I don't fancy your type."

The coach walked away. The six stared at each other in silence.

"Hear what he called us?" asked one voice at last.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Five heads nodded.

"He's right, too."

Five more nods.

"I guess we'll have to go in and beg."

This time the nods came slowly.

In a snaky, shuffling, awkward line they went back to the locker room. Only Bartley and Redway were in the place.

"What is it?" asked Bartley. "You'll have to hurry; I want to get back."

The six stared questioningly at Redway.

"Go on," ordered Bartley. "Redway's assistant captain."

They told their story stammeringly, but to the point. They were sorry. Would the captain take them back?

"To make more trouble?" Bartley asked.

"We've had our lesson," said one of the pleaders.

"And you're sorry because you have been dismissed."

"No; it isn't that. We were told you were a joke—"

## INSIDE BASEBALL

“By whom?” demanded Redway.

The six stared at the floor. One by one they shuffled uneasily; but they did not answer. Redway opened his mouth to speak again, saw the motion of Bartley’s hand and remained silent.

“Think you fellows will give me any more trouble if I take you back?”

“No, sir.”

That “sir” was a whole story in itself. It was the first time Bartley had been stirred since he entered St. Mary’s, and it would probably be the last. A smile struggled at the corners of his mouth.

“All right; I’ll take your word for it. Report to-morrow.”

They hastened away as though afraid the captain might change his mind. A minute later their excited voices drifted in from the street. Redway banged shut his locker door, and snapped the key in the lock.

“Why didn’t you make them tell?” he demanded.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"They wouldn't have told," answered Bartley. "You or I wouldn't have thought much of them if they had."

"I guess you're right," admitted the catcher reluctantly.

"Besides," the captain added quietly, "I think I know who started this," and Redway found himself nodding as though he knew, too.

Next day Mellen came late to the cage. Most of the candidates were already out. Half-way to the locker room he stopped and stared. The six candidates who had been dismissed the day before were working in the outfield.

Slowly Mellen moved toward them. He noticed Kennedy, Bartley's room-mate, gazing after him.

The six candidates, though, were unaware of the infielder's nearness until his voice carried across to their ears:

"Crawled, eh?"

They turned and frowned. "A little," said one of the group easily.

## INSIDE BASEBALL

"Crawled!" he taunted. "Like little puppies—"

Someone pushed him aside, and he almost lost his balance. He whirled around and found Kennedy at his elbow.

"Beg pardon," said the big pitcher; "but it isn't my fault, you know. You're in the way out here. You're an infielder."

"Were you shoving me?" demanded Mellen angrily.

The idea seemed to shock Kennedy if one could judge by his face.

"Shove you? Why should I do that?" His eyes met Mellen's, halted and then rested there; and suddenly the second baseman turned and went toward the locker room.

"I'd play in the infield when I came out," Kennedy called after him. "I would, if I were you."

Captain Bartley, helping to coach candidates on how big a lead it was safe to take off first, saw Jenkins's eyes fastened on the outfield. The captain looked that way, too. He saw

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Kennedy sauntering in and noticed the outfield candidates gesticulating excitedly.

"What was it, Ned?" he asked.

"An argument on how to play the outfield," answered the big pitcher.

"Didn't I see Mellen out there?"

"Oh, he butted in and told them they were all wrong."

Bartley went back to the coaching. Jenkins's eyelids drooped an instant, and then popped open. He nodded to Kennedy; and when he moved away later, the pitcher followed.

"What did Mellen say?" the coach asked.

"He was taunting them with being crawlers."

The coach's face showed that he had suspected as much. "It's just as well you didn't tell Bartley."

"I guess so. He's worrying about the nine. Last year he didn't worry; he wasn't captain."

The boy's tone carried a warning. The coach stepped closer.

"What do you mean, Kennedy?"

"Don't be surprised if his arm—"

## INSIDE BASEBALL

"I've been afraid of that," said the coach, and they went back toward the diamond.

That afternoon Jenkins and Bartley went after their charges with vigor and vim. The coach took the outer gardeners, and Bartley handled the infielders. The basemen worked out in sets, and at last the 'Varsity was called out and took possession of the diamond.

In the outfield, Jenkins was barking savagely. Mellen scarcely heard the coach's voice. But when Bartley spoke, the captain's words drummed loudly, disagreeably in his ears.

"He certainly does like to hear himself talk," grumbled Mellen.

Bartley, in the coaching box alongside third base, was urging on the infielders:

"That's the stuff, fellows. Lots of pepper; lots of pepper."

"Third, Redway; third. Good throw, old man."

"Come, Curtis; you're fighting the ball. There; that's better."

"Careful, Kaufman. Don't look around for

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

the bag; your feet should reach it almost by instinct."

Mellen snickered. "Huh! To hear him talk you'd think he knew something about the game."

Slowly the play quickened, and became faster and faster. The second baseman's thoughts began to travel. Then he heard his name:

"Wake up, Mellen."

He looked back across one shoulder.  
"What's the matter?"

"You can do better than that. Get in and hustle. You're slowing up the play."

The next ball bounded off to Mellen's right. He raced over, scooped it and, while on the run, tossed it to Kaufman. The first baseman threw home, grinned and nodded toward Bartley.

"No loafing while he's around. He doesn't miss much."

Mellen walked back to his station. "What does he know about baseball?" he growled.

He had asked himself that question so often

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that now it stuck in his mind. It was there during the rest of the practice; there while he splashed under the showers. Finally, as he was on his way to the street, the great idea came.

"I have it," he cried aloud.

"Let's see it," begged Curtis who was walking behind him.

"Oh, you're too bright," blazed the second baseman, and passed out.

But the idea was there—great, glowing, an answer to all his troubles. What was simpler? Bartley knew nothing about baseball as a fine art, whereas he knew the inside game. When the real work started outside, when the 'Varsity and the scrub began the practice games, then he could show his superiority. At first he thought of asking to be allowed to play with the scrub for a while, so that he could work his tricks against the 'Varsity and its captain. Then he remembered that there would be days when Bartley would pitch for the scrub.

"Wait!" he exulted slangily. "When he's pitching against the 'Varsity I'll pull all the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

inside stuff I know. Why, when I get through showing up our captain, he'll want to quit and crawl into a hole. I'll lead the nine yet."

As a foundation for what he would do later—to make sure that it would be observed when it happened—he began to talk inside baseball morning, noon and night. He diagrammed plays to the 'Varsity fellows; he spoke authoritatively to the second string fellows of how this play and that play should be made. After a while, if there was a candidate who hadn't received a first-class impression that the star infielder must have invented inside baseball, that candidate must have been deaf.

The days were becoming warmer. Now it was chilly only during the early morning, the late afternoon and at night. From the gym windows, the candidates could see the ground keeper rolling out the infield and getting it ready for play. One afternoon they saw him pouring a thick stream of whitewash along the foul lines. They besieged the coach.

"To-morrow?" they demanded.

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"To-morrow," Jenkins laughed, "we start the outdoor practice. Are you glad?"

They shrieked their joy, and pounded their fists on each other's backs. The wide free field, the smell of early grass, the ripple of soft breezes over flushed faces, the damp give of springy turf— They fell to cheering again at the prospect.

Mellen, dressing after the practice, laughed aloud in his delight. He felt that his time was coming.

Next day the boys ran riot on St. Mary's field. Fly balls soared joyously against a background of clear sky; the infielders played snappy ball on sharp, bounding hits. Off to one side the coach called each candidate in turn, and gave lengthy practice in sliding to bases—"hitting the dirt" the fellows called it. Mellen was given but little of this, as he was the best base runner of the nine. Bartley came over when the second baseman's name was called, and after he had gone into the bag, the captain smiled.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Haven’t forgotten how, have you, Mellen?”

“I never forget baseball,” answered the infielder.

“I wish all the fellows were that way,” sighed Bartley. “Come on, Curtis; try it again. I was watching you. Get some smoothness into that slide.”

Mellen walked away dissatisfied. It seemed strange to him that Bartley could draw all the sting from all his attempts at sarcasm.

“He’s fair,” whispered Kaufman.

“Who?” Mellen asked.

“Bartley. He’s over there jumping all over Curtis, and Curtis, Kennedy and Randolph Taylor are his best friends.”

The second baseman didn’t reply to this. After a while he asked:

“Taylor isn’t out with the squad this year?”

“No,” said Kaufman. “Guess he figures he hasn’t a chance with Bartley and Kennedy in form.”

A week later, when the candidates had become accustomed to playing on the dirt field, the

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'Varsity and the second nine were announced. All the 'Varsity fellows, for the present, held their places.

"All hands out early to-morrow," Jenkins ordered. "We line up for the first game."

"How long?" asked Redway.

"Five innings."

"Who pitches for the scrub?" asked Mellen.

"Bartley," said the coach.

The second nine cheered. Mellen walked away smiling.

"I'll show them how little he knows," he grinned.

Two hundred students came down to watch the first practice game. Bartley and Kennedy warmed up in front of the stands, Redway taking Kennedy's delivery and Murray handling the captain. When the pitchers came back to the bench together, Jenkins, sitting there, could see that Bartley was frowning.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"My arm doesn't seem right," the captain answered.

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"I told him not to work to-day," Kennedy interposed.

"It isn't sore," Bartley explained. "But somehow I can't seem to put any life into the ball. I suppose I'll warm up to it after I get started."

The coach sighed thoughtfully. "If it starts to feel—"

"I'll stop at once," the captain promised.

'Varsity went first to bat. Jenkins umpired the game from behind the plate. Standing in the rear of Murray, he could see every bend and break of Bartley's delivery.

The first 'Varsity batter punished the ball for a two-base smash. The second boy, sent up with instructions to sacrifice, almost beat the throw to first.

"He has nothing," Jenkins sighed again; "nothing but his glove and a prayer."

But Bartley still had that asset that had stood him in good stead before—his head. Finding the ball would not break right, he resorted to a baffling change of pace. His fast ball had

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plenty of "smoke," and his slow ball teased and dropped. The runner who had gone to third on the sacrifice hit, was thrown out at the plate, and the next batter drifted a fly that was caught by an outfielder. No runs had been scored; but the captain came back to the bench shaking his head.

In the second nine's half, Dixon, first up, beat out a splash in front of the plate. Then he woke up the stands by stealing second on Redway. The next two boys struck out, and Dixon stayed at the middle sack. As the next batter crouched at the plate, he took a long lead off second.

Bartley was coaching at third base. "That's it, Dixon," he called; "take a good lead. He's going to hit it a mile."

Suddenly Dixon saw Redway throw. He started back for second, and saw that nobody was covering that bag. He whirled toward third, and found that unguarded, too.

"Look out," cried Bartley. "Go back."

Even as he swung around again, he heard

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the slap of a ball striking a glove. Then a round, hard object was jammed between his shoulder blades.

“Out!” bawled Jenkins.

Dixon turned. The ‘Varsity shortstop had the ball.

“Some of Mellen’s inside baseball,” he grinned.

Redway, taking off his protector and mask, was chuckling.

“Mellen’s plan,” he acknowledged. “He thought it a good idea to throw to the shortstop when a runner had a long lead off second. It tangles up the runner, and before he can get straightened out short has tagged him.”

“It also tangles up others,” laughed Mellen as he trotted in. “Bartley was coaching at third.”

Redway’s face lost its smile, and he turned toward the bench.

“Batter up,” snapped Jenkins.

In each of the next three innings, by steady

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hitting, the 'Varsity got men on the bases, but did not score. Meanwhile, Kennedy, pitching superbly, held the scrub in the hollow of his hand.

The fifth inning opened. 'Varsity coaches shrieked from the coaching boxes.

"Get him this time. It's our last chance. Come on there, Mellen."

The second baseman was at the plate. Bartley pitched, and the infielder drove the ball to left field for two bases.

Curtis came next, and Curtis was given his base on balls. Murray, holding the sphere, came toward the box.

"Take your time," he pleaded. "Those last four were awful."

Bartley nodded, and walked toward third base. The guardian of that corner came out to meet him, and the shortstop moved over to cover the bag, remembering that there was a runner on second.

"As soon as I pitch," said Bartley, "run to the bag and stay there."

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The infielder stared in surprise. The stands began to chaff the pair:

“Tell him all about it, Bartley.”

“Come on; you’re delaying the game.”

“Write him a letter, old man.”

“Why,” stammered the third baseman, “if he bunts—”

“I know; I’ll take the bunt. You hustle to the bag; I’ll throw to you. We’ll force that man on second.”

The third baseman went back to his station, and the shortstop to his. The baseman was shaking his head.

“Nerve,” he mumbled; “pure nerve. That’s going some. Taking a chance of having three on bases and none out.”

He did not know what was passing in Bartley’s mind. Redway, waiting at the plate, batted from the right side. With a runner on first and a runner on second, it was certain that he would attempt to sacrifice. And if the ball was pitched on the inside corner of the plate, and low, the chances were all in favor of

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it going toward the third-base line. Then, too, the runner on second, not expecting a throw to third, would not run with all his speed when the ball was hit.

The students were cheering for a score. The coaches were barking threats and warnings. Bartley glanced toward third, nodded, and then pitched.

Even as the ball left his hand he was running toward the white line to his right. Redway bunted; and when the ball struck the grass, Bartley was waiting for it. Turning quickly, he shot it with all his strength to the third baseman. Mellen, six feet from his goal, heard the plunk of a ball and then Jenkins's voice:

“You’re out.”

He slid into the bag, stood up and shook the dust from his uniform. Suddenly his mouth hung open. He had plainly heard the coach call “Out!” Yet Redway was on first, and Curtis was on second.

“Who’s out?” he questioned.

He saw Jenkins wave a hand at him, and in

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bewilderment he stepped from the bag. Dixon, playing second base on the scrub, was capering madly.



"Turning quickly, he shot it with all his strength to the third baseman."

"Inside baseball," he kept calling. "Inside baseball."

The stands were taxing their young throats. Mellen had seen Bartley draw the third base-

## INSIDE BASEBALL

man aside. Now he learned that the students had seen it, too, for from the stands came a stamping chorus:

“Bartley! Bartley! Bartley!”

The 'Varsity, so confident a moment before, wilted after that play, and the next two boys were easy outs. In its last half the scrub did not score; and with a tied game as the result of the afternoon's work 'Varsity and scrub raced for the locker room.

“Did you see that play?” cried the scrub third baseman. “When he told me to play the bag and not bother with the ball, I thought he was crazy. Some captain, eh?”

“It was the real, 16-karat inside baseball,” exulted Dixon.

Such open praise tormented Mellen's ears. He had expected to confuse the captain, and instead, Bartley had routed him.

“It wasn't such a wonderful play,” he growled.

“How's that?” demanded several indignant voices.

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“It has been worked before.”

“Where?”

“At Chicago,” snapped Mellen, “during the world’s series of 1909. Three-fingered Brown was pitching for the Chicago Nationals. He worked that same play on the Detroit Americans.”

“In that case,” grinned Kaufman, “there wasn’t much excuse in letting Bartley work it on you, was there?”

The second baseman strode back to his locker. He had been outgeneraled, and the fellows were not missing a chance to tell him about it.

“Bartley read about that play,” he gulped; “he just read about it. What he doesn’t know about baseball would fill a book.”

He did not bother to comb his hair. As he left the room he recalled that not a word had been said about the play that had trapped Dixon. Just as he reached the door leading to the street a sadly cracked voice raised itself in song:

## **INSIDE BASEBALL**

We are the inside baseball kids,  
Tra, la, la ; tra, la, la—

Mellen, swallowing hard, passed out and forgot to close the door after him.

## CHAPTER V

### LOYAL FRIENDS

THE fellows were still singing when Bartley and Jenkins left the gym. Their happy voices carried enthusiasm and good cheer. They had heard so much about inside baseball that, in their hearts, they had begun to doubt their own and their captain's ability. To find that Bartley knew enough to play rings around the brainy Mellen— Well, in their glee they dwelt fondly on the things they would do to the mighty Rockton in the last game of the season.

Once outdoors, Jenkins fell to laughing, and as the seconds passed his merriment increased.

“What is it?” Bartley smiled.

“Did the Chicago Nationals really work that play?”

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"Certainly. Ty Cobb was the batter. That's why I remember it so distinctly."

"It certainly took the wind out of Mellen's sails," the coach exulted. "Maybe this will take down some of his conceit."

Bartley made no reply. After a while the coach noticed that the captain was twisting his right wrist and his elbow, and frowning a bit.

"What is it?" he demanded sharply.

"It isn't sore," said the captain.

"Well?"

"Did you notice how hard they hit me today?"

The coach had noticed it, and it had caused him many a pang. However, his voice was care-free when he spoke:

"Come over to my rooms, Bartley."

When they reached the lodgings, Bartley dropped into a chair and frowned at the walls. Jenkins made a great show of searching for something, and all the while he whistled with a vigorous desperation.

"I wouldn't worry about them hitting you,"

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he said at last. "It's pretty early in the season. What could you expect to have on the ball the first week of April?"

"Kennedy had about everything."

"But—"

"And I was as good this time last year as I was any time during the season."

The coach bit his lips, and took a turn up and down the room.

"Why, look here," he cried; "in a week or two you'll have everything. You need more practice. Get off to one side, and get an hour of pitching each afternoon. Work the kinks out of your arm."

"That's what I ought to do," the boy agreed.

"Ought to?" Jenkins flared. "What's to stop you?"

"I don't know. When I go off to pitch, I'm constantly watching the infielders and the outfielders. You know what I mean, Jenkins. Somehow, I can't give all my attention to my pitching."

The coach understood. A captain's responsi-



"Break! What kind of nonsense is this?"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

bilities were resting heavily on the boy's shoulders; the fear of leading a poor nine was taking his interest from his pitching. In his modesty, he did not realize that at his best he was fifty per cent. of the nine's strength; and the coach would not tell him so. Suddenly a lump came into Jenkins's throat. It would go hard with the nine if Bartley lost form.

"You go off to the side to-morrow, and forget the candidates. I'll take care of them. You hear that?"

"I'll try," the boy promised.

While that was not very satisfactory, the coach did not carry his orders further. The captain kept staring at the walls.

"I wish Taylor had come out," he said at last.

The coach seemed surprised. "Why?"

"If I—if I break, Kennedy can't go the whole season alone."

"Break!" bawled the coach. "Break! What kind of nonsense is this? I thought you had nerve."

## LOYAL FRIENDS

"This isn't a question of nerve. I don't seem to have the grip I had last year. You can't fool me, Jenkins; and there's no sense in my fooling myself. If I don't get going right— I wish Taylor had come out."

"He didn't amount to much last year," the coach observed.

"He was the best of the second string fellows."

"That wouldn't be saying much," Jenkins growled. In the last half-hour worried lines had mapped out a territory all their own around the corners of his mouth. Bartley, the star pitcher, weakening!

"You get out and pitch to-morrow. And if I see you looking around at the practice I'll make you work outside the grounds."

"I'll try, Jenkins."

"You'll do it," roared the coach. Great Scott, didn't the boy have sense enough to know that it was more important that he should be in form than that some outfielder should have the knack of picking liners out of the air?

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Bartley left Jenkins's house, trailed his feet across the fresh campus grass and entered Winslow Hall. Half-way upstairs he stopped and hesitated. Turning after a moment, he went down again, and entered Randolph Taylor's room.

Taylor, in the middle of the floor, was cutting, slashing and chopping with a tennis racquet, to the vast danger of the things on his dresser and the posters and the pictures and the flags on the walls. He stopped, grinned and mopped his flushed face.

"Hello, Bart," he panted. "How's the nine? Are we going to trim Rockton? Hear about my good luck?"

"Money from home?" the captain guessed.

"Better than that. It looks as though I'll make the tennis team. I'll play in the doubles with Benny Howell."

Bartley tried to look pleased, but his face clouded.

"Huh!" said Taylor. "You don't seem very happy about it."

## LOYAL FRIENDS

"I'm not," the captain acknowledged. "I wanted you to come out for the nine."

"But I haven't a chance with you and Kennedy able to pitch."

Bartley hesitated. "I may not be able to pitch—and win," he said at last.

"Not able to win," yelled Taylor, and then the captain's hand was clapped over his mouth.

"Not so loud. Don't let the whole school know it."

Taylor backed away and stared open-eyed.  
"You mean that, Dick?"

"Yes."

"Is your arm very sore?"

"Isn't sore at all."

"Then— Say, what is this, a joke?"

"I wish it were," the captain sighed. "I'm not half as good as last year. I put all I have into my effort, and instead of breaking with a snap, the ball wabbles."

"It may only be temporary," Taylor encouraged. "Next week you may be pitching like a streak."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"I know that."

"You wouldn't need me if you were right."

"Perhaps not."

"I'm—I'm pretty sure of a place if I stick to tennis, Dick."

The captain nodded. "I guess I'm asking too much. I thought that if I didn't improve, and that if you got going finely— Oh, well, I guess everything'll come out all right. What are the fellows saying about the nine?"

But instead of answering Taylor pursed his lips, and with his fingers thumped the gut strings of the racquet.

"Would you honestly be surprised if you didn't improve?" he asked suddenly.

"I—I don't know."

"If you didn't improve, do you think I'd be of any help?"

"I'm sure of it."

Taylor kissed the racquet, and tossed it with a spin on the bed.

"Good-by, tennis," he said briskly. "I'll be out for practice to-morrow, Dick."

## LOYAL FRIENDS

The captain was on his feet. "Hold on. This isn't fair. It was rotten of me to come here this way. I'm asking too much, and—"

"Shut up," growled Taylor affectionately, "or I'll put you out. Guess I'll put you out, anyway."

They wrestled across the room to the door, laughing now, and panting, too. There was a tremulous ring in Bartley's voice; half-way up the stairs he leaned over the banisters.

"Taylor," he called.

The boy below looked up.

"You're a brick," and as Taylor reached into the room for something to throw, the captain continued up the stairs.

Next day Taylor came out for practice. The coach pulled him aside.

"Did Bartley tell you he wasn't in shape?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"Of course, you'll keep that information to yourself!"

"No," said the boy; "I'll drop Rockton a line and tell her all about it."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

The coach laughed. Then Kennedy came along, took Taylor away and squeezed his hand.

"Bartley told me all about you coming out," said the captain's room-mate. "I'm going to teach you how to pitch my slow ball."

The squad cheered Taylor, and for a while there was great enthusiasm. Then Mellen cast a damper over Taylor's appearance.

"So!" he said. "The star pitcher has been shot to pieces, and re-enforcements are arriving."

"They are," agreed the coach in a voice that was dangerously calm. "There's Dixon, for one. Dixon, play second base; Mellen, try left field. Don't stand there looking at me."

It was the first time in his years at St. Mary's that the star infielder had been sent to the outfield. He walked off vowing dire things.

True to his word, Jenkins ordered Bartley off to the left of the diamond, out of the path of batted balls.

"I want you to pitch. Take Murray with

## LOYAL FRIENDS

you." The coach turned to the catcher. "If he lets his attention wander, let me know at once."

"You just bet I will," Murray promised.

By exerting his will power, the captain kept his eyes off the diamond, though several times he heard Jenkins's voice raised in sharp complaint. At the end of an hour he pulled off his glove and quit. Murray slipped away without saying a word. Bartley walked in toward the coach.

"Well?" Jenkins asked.

"No better," said the captain. "Wonder how Taylor's making out."

Taylor, Kennedy and Redway were coming toward them. The coach and the captain drew Redway aside.

"How is he?" they asked.

"Too soon to tell," the catcher replied. "He just lobbed them over. But he has one thing he didn't have last year."

"What's that?" asked Bartley.

"Control."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Redway walked away. Jenkins looked around.

“Where’s Murray?”

“He went to the locker room,” said the captain. “His heart is probably broken because of my showing.”

Bartley, Kennedy, Redway and Jenkins strolled back from practice that afternoon. They were nearing the campus when a voice came from behind:

“O Bartley! Wait!”

“That’s Curtis,” said the captain.

The group halted. The third baseman came up puffing and gasping.

“I ran all the way to overtake you. It’s time something was done about Mellen.”

The coach stepped forward. “What is it, Curtis?”

“He told some of the candidates that he was sent to the outfield as a punishment for having hit Bartley’s pitching so hard yesterday.”

“Who told you that?”

## LOYAL FRIENDS

"Nobody; I overheard him. He stopped mighty suddenly when he found I was near."

The veins in Jenkins's neck swelled out, and without a word he started back toward the gym. Apparently he quickly thought better of it, for he soon retraced his steps. In truth, it had dawned on him that the nine would be in a sad way without the services of the second baseman. He would hold his peace—would hold it until the boy's actions became intolerable.

Kennedy and Curtis, thinking that this was a matter that the captain and the coach would want to talk over, had gone on ahead. Redway, though, still lingered.

"If I may offer a suggestion—" he began.

"What is it?" Bartley asked.

"There's Dixon. Why not give him plenty of practice at second? Even if he never amounts to anything, the fact that he is receiving plenty of attention will sort of hold a club over Mellen's head. Then, should he make good—"

"Dixon plays," said the coach shortly. "Tell

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him to come out early to-morrow, will you, Redway?"

"With pleasure," the former captain grinned. He patted Bartley's back. "You're doing fine, old man. The nine's in as good shape for this time of year as I have ever seen it."

Next afternoon, as Mellen came from the locker room, Jenkins met him.

"Play left field, Mellen." Then, as the infielder started to protest: "You did some good batting against Bartley."

The boy shot a covert glance at the coach, only to find that Jenkins's eyes were turned his way.

"Dixon's improving every day," the man said; and Mellen went slowly to the outfield. Several of the candidates turned to stare after him.

"Aren't you in the wrong pew?" called Kaufman. The second baseman did not look back.

All that afternoon Mellen languished in the outfield—and the outfield is an awful fate for a spirited infielder. He misjudged several flies,

## LOYAL FRIENDS

and this added to his anger. It seemed to him that Jenkins was giving all his attention to Dixon, and once he saw Dixon make a stop that was truly remarkable. At that the students in the stands rose and cheered. A moment later Mellen dropped an easy chance.

"Get a net," a voice screamed.

Bartley, Taylor and Kennedy were off to one side pitching to Murray and Redway. The second baseman glared at the captain.

"This is some of your work," he growled.  
"I suppose Curtis told you."

Next day Mellen was given some practice in the infield, but Dixon received the lion's share. The third day Mellen practiced with the 'Varsity all day, and his spirits rose. So they had found who was boss of second base, eh? Searching idly for Dixon, he spied him at last in the outfield, batting against the deliveries of all three pitchers.

The second baseman's jaw dropped. The year he had first made the 'Varsity they had given him batting practice in just that way.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

A cold anger seized the boy. When he went to the locker room most of the fellows were dressing and the room had the sweaty, damp odor of soggy uniforms.

"Another practice game to-morrow," Jenkins called. "Bartley pitches for the 'Varsity; Kennedy for the scrub."

'Varsity and scrub cheered together. In all that room only Mellen was silent.

Next day, while he practiced with the infield prior to the game, Kaufman came over near him.

"Sleep well last night?" asked the first baseman.

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know. You look pale around the gills."

"I'm all right," snapped the second baseman.

When the game started, he took no part in the stirring chatter that the infield directed at the pitcher. In the second inning, with a runner on third and two gone, he struck out. As he swung at the last ball, Kennedy frowned and

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stared at him in a puzzled way. After that the big pitcher took to watching the second baseman.

In the fifth inning, with runners on first and second and one out, Kennedy came to bat.

"Look out for a double play," bawled the scrub coaches.

Kennedy drove the ball at the shortstop. That player tossed to Mellen. The second baseman had a world of time to make his throw to first base for Kennedy was not a speedy runner. Yet he threw weakly, and Kaufman was forced to strain in to get his hands on the ball, so far that his right foot left the bag. Kennedy was safe, and the runner who had been on second scored easily with the first run of the game.

Kennedy, instead of rejoicing, scowled at Mellen. The second baseman turned away, and did not meet his eyes. Kennedy was still scowling as the next batter fouled out.

The moment the ball was caught, Kennedy ran toward the raised pitcher's box. He met Bartley as the captain started for the bench.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Mellen isn't trying, Dick."

"Ssh!" the captain warned. "No gossip!"

"But I know. That time he struck out he made no attempt to hit the ball. I could see. I tell you—"

"Ssh!" Bartley's voice was low. "He's coming. Keep your mouth shut."

Kennedy turned away with a laugh. "The same old easy mark, eh? Going to let him walk all over you and get away with it?"

But though Kennedy's blood was boiling he said nothing to the fellows on the bench. He knew that Jenkins would not know, for the coach was over at third base and for one thing, could not see the type of balls that Mellen had been swinging at. But Redway had been catching. Kennedy turned and looked at the catcher, and slowly Redway's head nodded.

Slowly the next four innings passed. As each turn at bat left the 'Varsity still scoreless, Kennedy's pulses raced the faster. The big pitcher was beginning to see that Mellen was becoming extraordinarily cheerful.

## LOYAL FRIENDS

"I'd like to choke him," he groaned.

'Varsity came to bat in the ninth inning. Curtis and Redway tried hard, but both boys went out on easy chances. Bartley came to the plate with the score 1 to 0 against him. If he went out the 'Varsity was beaten—beaten by the lowly scrub.

Kennedy, the ball concealed in his gloved hand, glanced toward the bench. Mellen was trying hard to hide a delighted grin. For the moment the big pitcher thought of sticking the ball straight across the plate and letting Bartley hammer it to the fence. That, at least, would tie the score. That idea passed, and he threw a sharp-breaking curve in response to Redway's signal. The captain swung. The ball swirled up into the air, and Dixon was under it when it came down.

Kennedy, breathing heavily, walked in toward the bench for his sweater. The fellows were on the run for the gym, for the game had been long drawn out and they were hungry. Mellen hung back, and within a minute he, Bartley and Ken-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

nedy had the diamond end of the field to themselves.

"You pitched a dandy game, Kennedy," said the second baseman loudly. "Let me congratulate you."

He held out his hand. Kennedy made no effort to take it.

"I didn't win," said the big pitcher, "if that's what you mean."

"No!"

"No. You threw the game away."

"I threw— What are you talking about?"

Mellen was bristling, but Kennedy showed no concern.

"You heard me. You threw the game. As for shaking hands with you, I have no use for your sort."

The pitcher started off toward the gym. Bartley followed at his heels.

"I told him what I thought of him," Kennedy blazed.

"You're hurting the nine," said Bartley quietly. "You're hurting its chances, and you're



"I have no use for your sort."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

hurting my chances. Who'll play in Mellen's place if he goes?"

"But—"

"I know. But there's the nine to think of. He wouldn't play dirty in the real games. Don't you see that? He isn't fighting St. Mary's. He's fighting me."

Half-way across the field Kennedy swung round and started back. Was he on his way to resume the argument?

"Ned," called Bartley.

The big pitcher paid no attention. The captain saw him meet Mellen and stop. Then, in the coming dusk, their shapes became a blur.

The seconds dragged. Kennedy at last returned. Bartley fell into step beside him. They came, in silence, to the gym.

"What—what did you say to him?" the captain asked.

"I apologized," Kennedy growled.

Bartley put out a shaking hand. "Ned," he said tremulously; "Ned."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST GAME

AFTER that second practice game there was no doubt left in Jenkins's mind that as a pitcher Bartley was not the Bartley of old. True, the scrub had scored only one run, but that did not begin to tell what they had done to the captain's delivery. Their ten fat hits had been collected, for the most part, after two were out. This was all that had prevented a slaughter.

After that, the coach saw to it that come what would Bartley took one solid hour of practice each afternoon. He sent the boy and Murray to the outfield, and the captain, under orders, worked with his back to the diamond. Each day, though, as Murray came back to the locker room, his face was mournful.

"He's improving," he told the coach, "but

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

so, so slowly. There's no use in fooling ourselves. If he doesn't swing into his stride soon they'll murder him."

"You're not telling him that?"

"Certainly not. I'm telling him that he's pitching great guns."

"He will be, too, before long," said Jenkins confidently.

But once Murray's back was turned he groaned aloud. Kennedy was now the only pitcher he could depend upon. Only one pitcher—and the season not yet begun.

Then Redway came to Jenkins and pulled him off to one side. "Have you been watching Taylor?"

The coach shook his head. "No; he was a joke last year. He's out now only out of friendship for Bartley. You ought to know what that means."

"Bartley and Kennedy have been coaching him," said the catcher.

Something in the boy's voice made Jenkins look up. "Well, what has that to do with it?"

## THE FIRST GAME

"You come out," advised the catcher, "and decide for yourself. Come out to-morrow."

Next afternoon, while the three pitchers were hurling to Redway and to Murray, Jenkins strolled to the outfield. Standing behind Redway, he watched intently every time Taylor threw. Little by little, as the minutes passed, a great secret hope flared up in his breast.

"The boys need batting practice," he said suddenly. "Let's see, suppose you pitch to them, Taylor."

Redway understood. "I'll catch," he volunteered.

Jenkins ordered the scrub to line up in back of Taylor, and the 'Varsity was sent to bat. The coach backed off a way so as not to betray his interest. He was anxiously biting his lips.

"Now comes the test," he muttered.

Mellen's confident swagger as he went to bat was calculated to scare any young pitcher. Redway sprang to the breach.

"Get this fellow," he urged. "He's easy."

Taylor put a "fast one" over shoulder high.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

His speed was a surprise to Mellen, and the second baseman popped to the infield.

"Ha, ha," shrilled Redway. "I told you."

Kaufman came to the plate trailing a bat that looked like the stump of a tree.

"Get out another ball," he said pleasantly.  
"I'll drive this one out of the lot."

He swung at the first pitch, missed and seemed surprised. He swung again, and this time the ball dribbled to Taylor.

"You fooled me that time," Kaufman grinned.

"I make a business of it," Taylor scolded.

Later, when Redway chased back for a foul, Jenkins was standing with his hands behind his back staring blissfully at the clouds.

"Well?" demanded the catcher in a low voice.

"Let me alone," said the coach softly. "I'm afraid I'll wake up and find it's a dream."

Redway laughed. "This is no dream. This is the goods—*the* goods."

After the practice, the coach overtook Taylor on his way to the locker room.

## THE FIRST GAME

"How would you like to pitch some of the games this year?" he asked.

"Do you mean it, Jenkins?" the boy gasped.

"If you keep on improving," the coach promised, "I think I'll give you a chance."

Taylor's face was beaming. "Say, Jenkins, I'll work— What's the best liniment to use for my arm?"

The coach's eyes traveled across the field to Bartley. "Good boy," he murmured affectionately. "You brought him out, and you wouldn't be a bit jealous if he took your place."

Now the time for the opening game of the season—the contest with Orion—was approaching. Blue and gold flags were hauled out of trunks, and megaphones were taken from closets and outrageously tested. Out on the campus crowds of boys tried their voices with experimental cheers; and whenever this din started, it was noticed that Dr. Norton, the principal, lowered the windows of his study.

Fellows who had never come out for the nine took to tossing baseballs from one to another,

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

and the lad who wasn't willing to discuss St. Mary's chances at all hours of the day speedily found himself ignored. Of course, there were one or two fellows who kept digging knowledge from their books and who did not seem to know that the ancient enemy, Rockton, had such a thing as a dangerous baseball nine. But they were the wonder and the shame of the school.

Out on St. Mary's field Bartley suffered all the agonizing doubts that can riot in the mind of a baseball captain. He besieged Jenkins with a flood of questions. Was the infield sure enough on bunts? Were the fellows pat on the signals? Wouldn't it be wise to have another lesson in sliding to bases?

At least the coach caught the captain by the collar and playfully ran him toward the outfield.

"Pitch to Murray," he ordered, "and don't come back here until I call you."

Mellen, ever watchful, did not fail to see what had happened. He partly guessed the cause.

## THE FIRST GAME

"Our captain seems to be in the way," he observed. "Jenkins is chasing him."

"And," observed Curtis, "our second baseman seems to be troubled with another attack of words."

Kaufman laughed, and Mellen turned away scowling. He didn't argue as freely as formerly, for he had learned that the fellows had a dis-comforting knack of turning his speeches back on him. For instance, some of them called him "Chicago" Mellen in honor of the play Bartley had made in the first practice game.

But though he no longer lectured on such topics as inside baseball, he still believed that anybody who went searching for baseball brains in the St. Mary's 'Varsity would have to tap the skull of Samuel Mellen, second baseman.

"I'll show them a thing or two yet," he vowed. "They'll come to me."

He had awakened at last, reluctantly, to the fact that there was scant hope of a change in the captaincy. What higher honor, then, than to have the school, when the season ended, say-

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ing that they had made a mistake and that he should have been selected?

Two days before the Orion game a chilly spring rain opened shop and began to do an industrious business. Bartley, crossing the campus that morning, met Jenkins.

"This will keep up all day," said the coach. "I'm going down to see how the field's absorbing the water."

"Who will we pitch against Orion—Taylor or Kennedy?" the captain asked. "My arm isn't in the best of shape."

"See me to-night about that," Jenkins called.

Bartley watched him as he crossed the campus, heedlessly splashing his way through pools of water. The captain wondered that Jenkins carried no umbrella, even though he did wear a raincoat.

"It'll be cold and wet on the field," he shivered. Then he ran for the warm, dry class rooms, and forgot all about the coach's dripping journey.

That night, when he went to Jenkins's rooms,



"Bartley watched him as he crossed the campus."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

the coach's eyes were red and his head was bobbing with the force of vigorous sneezes.

"We'll pitch Kennedy," Jenkins wheezed. "There's lots of time to give Taylor his chance. Besides, Rockton will have a couple of fellows at the game watching how we show up. Nothing like giving them something to worry about."

"Better take care of that cold," the boy advised.

"Just a cold in the head," the coach scoffed. "I'll be all right to-morrow."

Next day, though, he did not come to St. Mary's field. His strange absence had a depressing effect on both 'Varsity and scrub. Bartley ran the practice aimlessly, his eyes constantly traveling to the gym door. The work of the boys became slovenly. Then Bartley noticed Bruce, the captain of the eleven, motioning to him from the nearest section of the grand stand. He went over.

"Is Jenkins sick?" Bruce asked.

"Why?" asked the captain in a trembling voice.

## THE FIRST GAME

"I saw a doctor's carriage there when I came down."

Five minutes later Bartley stopped the practice. The majority of the players thought that the halt was due to a fear that they might go into the first battle too finely drawn. To Curtis, Kennedy and Redway, though, the captain told the truth.

"I'm going up to see what's the matter," he informed them.

They went down to Winslow Hall and waited for him.

Darkness was falling when he entered his room in the dormitory building. His steps were weary. Nodding to the three 'Varsity players, he sank into a chair.

"I'm tired," he sighed.

"Where have you been?" Kennedy asked.

"Chasing a doctor all over town. I finally found him."

"Then Jenkins is really sick?" Redway demanded.

"He's threatened with pneumonia. He'll

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probably be in the house for a week. I'll have to be both captain and coach to-morrow."

In an instant his friends had surrounded his chair.

"Brace up, old man; you're equal to a little thing like that."

"Certainly. Just forget Jenkins isn't there."

"The fellows will all stand by you."

"That's the only good part of it," said the captain with a feeble smile. "You see, the whole game is up to me. But we'll all do our best, won't we?"

"Until the last man is out," said Redway earnestly.

"And then some," chimed in Curtis and Kennedy.

Next morning the whole school knew that the coach would not be on the bench to aid the nine that afternoon. Gradually the fellows massed in front of Winslow Hall, and soon they were giving Bartley mighty cheers of faith and confidence. Mellen, though, went to his room,

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locked the door and made merry all by himself.

"Jenkins won't be on the bench," he giggled. "Bartley'll be giving the orders. Think of it! I'll show them who's boss."

Another cheer arose from the campus. The second baseman walked to the window. Then the cheer turned into a name:

"Bartley! O you Bartley!"

"The fools," said Mellen scornfully. "They're scared stiff for fear he'll make a mess of the game, and yet they go out there and cheer him."

The infielder's knowledge of school spirit and school loyalty was meager, indeed.

In the locker room that afternoon, after the nine had dressed, Bartley, white-lipped, faced them as he had seen the coach do.

"Fellows," he said, "Jenkins isn't with us to-day. We must do this all by ourselves. Let's make a good job of it."

"Let's make a perfect job of it," boomed Kaufman. "How about a shut-out?"

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Some of the fellows were beginning to grin.

"Seeing as I'm the pitcher, I'm willing," laughed Kennedy, and they laughed with him. Without giving the merriment a chance to die out, Bartley hurried them out onto the field.

They handled the ball sharply in practice, and St. Mary's students were elated. Bartley, as a matter of course, warmed up with Kennedy and Taylor. Then, his right arm sweater-wrapped, he retired to the bench.

"If that doctor had only let me see Jenkins," he groaned, "he could have told me what kind of game he wanted played against these fellows."

He tried hard to keep his worry from showing in his face. He remembered how well his players had fielded. The umpire announced the batteries; next a bell rang three times. Kennedy and Redway stood up, and the St. Mary's cheer was rolling across the field as the catcher reached for his chest protector.

"Our boys will play good ball behind you," Bartley said. "Keep the ball over; keep them

## THE FIRST GAME

hitting. Make them swing at the first and the second pitches."

"That's the stuff," Redway chuckled.

Kennedy retired the side on seven pitched balls. Curtis threw out one batter, and Mellen made two dazzling stops. Bartley sighed with relief. He had guessed the right way to start the fight, anyway.

The first three innings passed, and left St. Mary's and Orion scoreless. In the last half of the fourth inning, with one out, Kaufman singled. Mellen picked out a bat in front of the bench, and Bartley leaned forward. Kaufman was too slow to steal, and that same slowness, should Mellen hit sharply to the infield, would probably result in a double play. Redway, a good pinch hitter, came next—

"Sacrifice," Bartley ordered.

"Sacrifice?" Mellen asked politely.

Bartley nodded, and flashed the signal to Kaufman.

The Orion pitcher delivered the ball. Kaufman, dancing near first base, shook his head in

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bewilderment. Kennedy, on the bench, leaned toward Bartley.

"Didn't you tell him to sacrifice?"

"Yes."

"He's swinging at the ball."

"I see it," said the captain.

Mellen, on the next pitch, shot a short single to right field, and Kaufman went to third base. After that Redway went out and Kennedy struck desperately at three teasing curves. Orion rooters mopped flushed faces, and cheered uproariously.

When Mellen came back to the bench again, after three Orion batters had been retired, he dropped down beside Bartley.

"He was sticking over the one ball I can always murder," said the second baseman easily. "I just had to take a crack at it."

Bartley bit his lips, nodded and said nothing. Mellen stared out across the diamond and smiled.

Two innings later, when St. Mary's went to bat, the score was still 0 to 0. Hardy, first up,

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went to first base on four balls that missed the plate. A moment later Kaufman doubled to center, and the Orion fielder held Hardy at third. Again, with men on the bases, Mellen stooped in front of the bench to select his bat.

"Bunt!" said Bartley. His voice was steady, though his fingers were twitching. "There's no one out. They're playing in, but they're expecting hard hitting. A bunt will stand them on their heads."

Mellen, without replying, walked to the plate. He swung savagely at the first ball, and every boy on the bench held his breath. This was plain mutiny. Then came the crack that told that bat and ball had met.

The right fielder, remembering that short single of the fourth inning, had come far in. Ordinarily the hit that now sang his way would have been an easy out. As it was, it traveled far over his head, and with his heart in his throat he went chasing after it.

The St. Mary's stands were in a riot. Hardy

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trotted over the plate with the first run of the game, and a few seconds later Kaufman lumbered in after him. Mellen, running wildly, was between second and third. The Orion right fielder reached the ball, swung around and threw to the first baseman, who had run out. Mellen had turned third.

“Home!” roared the stands.

Using a beautiful slide, St. Mary’s star infielder beat the relayed throw.

“Mellen! Mellen! Mellen!” shrieked the stands.

Smiling and bowing, he walked to the bench, clapping the dust out of his uniform as he went. Silently the players made room for him.

“Just had to take a crack at that one,” he said carelessly. “A bunt wouldn’t have scored three runs.”

Again Bartley said nothing. Again Mellen smiled.

Though the Orion pitcher was rattled, he managed, with good support, to retire the next three boys to face him. The St. Mary’s play-

## THE FIRST GAME

ers arose from the bench and started for the field. Then Bartley spoke:

“Mellen!”

The second baseman turned. “What’s the matter?”

“Dixon plays second. Get out there, Dixon.”

Startled, the infield star leaned toward the captain. “You mean that?” he demanded incredulously.

“You heard me.”

“After me winning the game? I—”

“You’ll sit down here,” snapped Bartley, “or go to the gym.”

Mellen’s eyes glared, wavered an instant and then shifted. This was not the easy-going Bartley he had known, and for the moment he did not know how to fight back. Suddenly he turned and walked away from the bench.

The stands had seen Dixon go to Mellen’s place, and had wondered. When Mellen appeared, hundreds of throats did their best to express their appreciation. The hero walked past

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his station, past the outfielders and up the gym steps.

"Put out of the game," ran a whisper through the stands. The students gasped.

Dixon did not have a chance in the seventh inning. The next inning saw him go to bat, and strike out miserably.

"Yah!" yelled a voice. "Give us Mellen."

When the ninth inning opened, Dixon went to his place without a word. So far he had not had a fielding chance. But now the first batter tapped the ball to him. He fumbled, recovered and threw the ball far over Kaufman's head. The runner went to third base.

"What's the matter with Mellen?" yelled the same voice.

The next boy to face Kennedy drove a fly to the outfield, and the runner on third scored after the catch. Orion had its first run.

"Come on," shrilled the coaches. "Hit it to that second baseman. He's a really, truly wonder."

The batter popped a little infield fly. Dixon

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clutched it fearfully, juggled it to his breast and then dropped it.

The next boy to come to the plate hit to him, and again he fumbled. The stands were raving, and the St. Mary's infield was fidgeting nervously. Then came the first real hit of the inning, a short single to center. One runner scored, and the score was 3 to 2, with two boys still on the bases.

In the pinch Kennedy put everything he had on the ball. The next boy to face him struck out.

"Come on," called Curtis. "One more. Get this fellow."

With runners on second and third, and two out, a hit would probably win the game. In the stands the students were on their feet, stamping and shrieking. On the bench, Bartley breathed in little gasps.

"Hold them," he muttered. "O Dixon, Dixon."

Kennedy, with a last look around the field, pitched. Bartley saw the batter swing, saw the

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ball bound toward Dixon, saw the second base-man stoop and come up empty handed. The stands roared with rage.

“Take him out.”

“Lemon! Lemon!”

“Take him out.”

Two joyous boys had scampered over the plate. The next batter fouled out, but the score was 4 to 3 in Orion’s favor. St. Mary’s came in for its last turn at bat.

Kennedy, when he reached the bench, sat down heavily. Bartley touched his knee.

“I’m—I’m sorry, Ned.”

“About what?” the pitcher asked.

“You had this game won, and—”

“And I’d have punched your head if you hadn’t put him out,” stormed Kennedy. “Sure as fate, I’d have punched it as soon as I got you back to the room.”

The first St. Mary’s hitter had gone out on a splash to the box. The next boy tapped to the short stop, and was thrown out. With hope dead in St. Mary’s breasts, Hardy singled. The

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hit brought forth a few feeble cheers. Then Kaufman lined the ball over the infield, and Hardy raced to third.

Now a hit would mean victory. St. Mary's came to life with a mighty burst of sound. But even as the cheers were surging in great waves, Bartley, with blinking eyes, was watching Dixon pick out a bat.

A hush fell as the boy walked to the plate. It was as though somebody had clamped down the lid on a boxful of noise.

"Can't they give him some encouragement?" Bartley groaned.

The Orion pitcher drove the ball toward the catcher. Dixon swung too late.

"Strike one," called the umpire.

The silence was oppressive. The feeble barking of the coachers sounded like pistol shots after a furious cannonade.

This time the pitcher used a slow ball. Dixon swung too soon.

"Strike two!"

Up in the stands a man made a megaphone

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

of his hands. "What did they do to Mellen?"

Bartley, on the bench, could see Dixon's face go white. Again the ball came toward the plate, but this time Dixon stood there motionless, the bat gripped in trembling hands, and seemed unable to move.

The umpire's arm jerked upward. "You're out."

Hardy and Kaufman turned gloomily toward the gym. Bartley swallowed once, twice, and then became conscious of the Orion yell of triumph. He had been captain and coach. He had benched Mellen. He had put in Dixon—and Dixon had tossed the first game of the season away.

## CHAPTER VII

### RESULTS OF DEFEAT

**B**ARTLEY, arising from the bench at last, followed the players to the gym. After other games, he remembered, the streets around St. Mary's field had echoed to the happy ring of school songs—songs that he knew and loved. Now, however, strange, brassy voices sang unknown, unloved melodies—the songs of pagan Orion.

He overtook the slouching players before they reached the gym steps. In the locker room, Mellen, fully dressed, awaited them. He swung his feet over the sides of a bench and tried hard not to look pleased.

“What was the score?” he inquired. “Did we beat them badly?”

“Weren’t you watching from a window?” Kennedy snapped. “I thought I saw you.”

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Mellen made no denials. "Well," he said virtuously, "it can't be blamed on me. I won it—and then it was thrown away."

Nobody answered this. Boys were pulling off hot, sweaty uniforms and taking their showers in silence. Dixon, off in a lonely corner, was trying hard to keep back the tears.

"Did Orion ever beat us before?" asked a voice.

"Never," said Mellen promptly.

"You graduate in June, Mellen, don't you?" Kennedy drawled.

"Yes."

"Ah!" observed the pitcher. "I dare say Orion will never beat us again."

"Oh, I don't know," smiled the star infielder. "Dixon will be here—"

"And playing second base, most likely," broke in Curtis.

"And winning game for us," Kennedy prodded.

Mellen bowed serenely and walked out. He

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

could afford to let them talk. The game had been lost—the first game of the season. His hitting had won it—and Dixon had lost it. He could picture a merry earthquake when Jenkins heard the news.

"And he'll hear it from me," the boy declared. "I'll bet that joke captain puts me out of no more games."

Similar thoughts were running through Bartley's mind. Jenkins had been anxious to win the game because Rockton fellows would be watching the contest. He wanted to give Rockton something to worry about; he had said so. For this reason he had used Kennedy.

The captain did not try to cheer the squad. Whatever had happened they would have to think out for themselves. On the stairs, on his way out, he overtook Dixon. The scrub second baseman hung his head.

"Drop in my room to-night," Bartley invited. "You're almost a stranger. Come around once in a while."

Dixon felt that it was a brave effort to make

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

him forget. "I'm sorry," he blurted out. "I can't understand it. I—I went all to pieces."

Bartley patted his shoulder. "It will never happen again, old man. Stage fright, that's what it was. It only comes once."

"Did—did you ever have it?"

"I gave five bases on balls in a row—and they yanked me out of the box."

"That was fine," said Dixon, "what Kennedy and Curtis said to Mellen. It gave me some courage."

"That's our crowd," laughed Bartley. "Come around and get to know us," and then he passed on, leaving the scrub infielder with a lighter heart. Though he did not know it, he had added one to the small army of fellows at St. Mary's who would fight for him to the last ditch.

Bartley, on his way to Jenkins's boarding house, found the campus crowded. The students stared after him curiously and with many a whisper.

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

"Pounding me," the captain thought bitterly, "for taking Mellen out."

He had not seen the coach since Jenkins had been taken sick. Now, a smiling landlady told him that he could go up. He found the man reclining in a Morris chair. Two bottles of medicine were on the desk.

"How's the patient?" the boy asked.

"A little battered, but still there," the coach smiled. "What was the score? I heard plenty of cheering."

"Four to three."

"H'm! As close as that! I figured we'd win easily."

The captain partly turned his head away.  
"We—we lost."

Out of the corners of his eyes he could see the coach grasp the arms of the chair and sit up.

"We lost!"

The boy nodded.

"Did you have trouble?"

Another nod.

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"So! That's it! Well, let's hear the story."

Bartley told him what had happened. When he finished, the coach's face was stern.

"Did—did I do right in putting him out, Jenkins?" the boy asked timidly.

"You'd have had a sorry time with me if you hadn't," was the grim answer. "We've fooled with that fellow long enough. There's a limit to everything. Even if it means lost games— Send Mellen to me."

"I think he'll be here to-night with a tale of woe," said the captain.

Bartley was a good prophet. A few minutes past 8 o'clock Mellen came protestingly to the coach's rooms.

"You know we lost?" he asked.

"I do."

"It wasn't my fault. My hitting scored all our runs. And Bartley put me out and put Dixon in—only for that we'd have won. I don't want to boast, Jenkins, but I could kill anything that pitcher sent up."



"'Now get out of here!'"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Anything else?”

“Yes. I was humiliated to-day before the whole nine. There I was hitting them to the fence and—”

“Didn’t Bartley tell you to sacrifice?”

“Yes, but—”

“And weren’t you ordered to bunt?”

“Yes; but you see—”

“I don’t see,” roared the coach, “and you needn’t argue. I’ve been watching you a long time. You’ve been looking for trouble, and now you have it. Take care of it; nurse it, for you’re going to have it with you a long time. Our next game is with Madison, and Dixon plays in our line-up. Now get out of here.”

Mellen went out of the room on the run. First he had found Bartley ready to battle it out with him, and now the coach was seeking war. It was the first time Jenkins had treated him harshly, and it quite took his breath away. Truly, this had been a day of staggering surprises.

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

Bartley, when he found that Jenkins backed him up in what he had done, ceased to look upon the Orion game as a calamity. But the approval of the coach and the approval of the school were two different propositions. The students were interested only in games won. They didn't know the cause of Mellen's banishment. If the captain was going to throw away contests, they asked, who could tell where he would stop?

Their attitude had a disquieting effect on the players of both 'Varsity and scrub. Then, too, when practice was resumed, they piled into the stands and watched the work in a sort of hopeless silence. Usually, no matter how black the prospects of a team, the fellows will turn out and cheer their heads off. This spring, however, everything seemed to be going wrong. The players began to lose heart—and Bartley began to lose weight, and his pitching lost the slight improvement it had won.

When Jenkins, still somewhat pale, came back to St. Mary's field to take charge of the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

practice, he found the nine almost disorganized. He studied the stands.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked Bartley.

"Every day."

"It never happened before, and it won't happen again," the coach flared; and that night the campus bulletin board carried this message:

Hereafter, the nine will practice behind  
closed gates. Students will not be admitted  
to the grounds.

JENKINS, Coach.

BARTLEY, Captain.

While the order removed a bad influence from the field, it increased the campus gloom. True, the football squad often held secret signal drills, but this was the first time the nine had played to empty stands. The students took to croaking of the awful things Rockton would probably do to St. Mary's. Only the fellows who had been candidates in the past for the eleven, the crew or the track team seemed to guess the cause of the order.

Mellen, chastened in spirit, went to the field

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

each afternoon, and for the first time since he came to St. Mary's, practiced steadily with the second nine. Dixon had already been told that he would play against Madison, and his eyes had widened.

"After what I did—"

"Forget it," said Jenkins kindly; "that's past."

Once Mellen's ambition had been to force Bartley to resign as captain. Now he was fighting his hardest to get back to the 'Varsity. There were times when his heart seemed to turn cold. Dixon was to be used against Madison. Suppose, just suppose, that Dixon should put up a rattling good game—

Each afternoon he plunged eagerly into the work and gave his best—and his best was something to gladden the eye.

"Are you watching Mellen?" Bartley asked Jenkins.

"Yes. The lesson's doing him good. He's been rather quiet of late."

"Will you play Dixon against Madison?"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Certainly. Why?"

"I thought—"

"Ssh!" whispered the coach. "I'll tell you the truth about this—it's all a grand stand play for Mellen's benefit. The moment Dixon cracks, Mellen goes in. That's been my plan all along."

The coming of the Madison game spelled trouble for the coach. He had worked Kennedy in the season's opening battle, and he did not want to use that stalwart pitcher so soon again if he could help it. It would have been joy to his heart to see Bartley stride out, as of old, to go under fire. He half suspected what the Orion game and the hours that followed had cost the captain. The day before the Madison tussle he took Bartley and Redway to the little alley back of the stands.

"Now," he said, "loosen up, there, and let's see what you have."

He did not stand in back of Redway; he stood off to one side where he could watch Redway's face. Not an expression escaped his

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

eager eyes, and at last he walked in. The catcher straightened up.

"Very bad?" asked the coach.

"If I thought it would have done this to him," Redway wailed, "I think I would have held the captaincy."

"I don't want to use Kennedy," mused Jenkins.

"Taylor," said Redway. Then, as the coach started to speak: "I know; you're going to tell me that after what happened against Orion we must win this game. All right; Taylor."

"You're sure, Redway?"

"Positive."

"It's Taylor," said the coach.

When the catcher carried the news to Taylor, the big pitcher took a great, deep breath.

"My first game for St. Mary's," he said softly. "My first game."

Fearfully the students of the blue and gold came to that contest. Their pride, however, had risen to save them, and they royally

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greeted their nine. Dixon's reappearance on second sent a gasp through the stands, even through the freshmen, the boys of his own class.

To-day Jenkins sat on the bench. He felt that he had two experiments on the field—Taylor and Dixon. The pitcher was the first to ease his mind. By the end of the second inning the coach had ceased to worry about how many runs Madison might score, and the Madison coach was wondering if he was going to score at all.

"Fine work," Jenkins told Taylor.

"They taught me," said the boy; "Kennedy and Bartley."

"Rats!" growled Kennedy; and the coach wiped a smile from his lips.

In the third inning Dixon had his first chance. It was a white streak of a hit, and the St. Mary's students held their breaths. Dixon, though, made a perfect stop, and with the coolness of a veteran stood up, timed his throw to the second and beat the runner by a step.

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

A yell broke from the stands. Mellen, on the bench, tapped nervous fingers against the wooden seat.

At the bat, however, Dixon was the same failure. To-day he did not strike out, but his hits were weak taps to the infield.

Both Taylor and the Madison pitcher were "going good" and in almost every inning it was one, two, three order for both nines.

The eighth opened dismally for St. Mary's with a strike out. Then the complexion of things suddenly changed. The Madison pitcher momentarily lost control; one batter was walked and another was hit. The stands awoke. As Kaufman struck out, both runners moved up a base on a double steal. One eager boy was on third, another was on second—and Dixon was rising from the bench to bat.

He glanced at the coach, but Jenkins was staring ahead. As he picked out his stick, he again glanced at Jenkins, and this time caught his eye. So they stared at each other a moment.

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"Batter up!" called the umpire.

Hundreds of feet began to stamp with the precision of machinery. Jenkins cleared his throat.

"Bat for Dixon, Mellen."

Dixon sighed in sudden relief, and came back to the bench. "I was afraid— Hit it out, Mellen."

The stamping became a roar as Mellen walked to the plate. Those in the stands could not hear, but they could see the wave of the umpire's arm—right arm for a strike and left arm for a ball—and soon they knew that the count was "two and three." Then Mellen seemed to slide forward to meet the next pitch.

He caught it near the end of his bat, and drove it on a line over the heads of the infielders. The hit meant two runs. It also meant the game, for in the ninth inning Madison again drew a cipher.

Mellen played in the field during Madison's last turn at bat, but he played as one in a dream. His hands still tingled from the shock

## RESULTS OF DEFEAT

of having met the ball. He knew that Taylor was pitching, and that if a ball came to him he was to throw it to Kaufman. But nothing came his way, and at last he saw the fellows running for the gym and he fled with them across the outfield. Not until he was in the locker room did his head clear, and then the captain was speaking.

"A fine hit, Mellen. It was placed beautifully. I never saw anything prettier."

The second baseman nodded, and walked to his locker. Would he play in the next game? Had that hit won him back the 'Varsity? Of course Bartley had praised him, but what else could the captain do? One thing was certain, if he did go back to the 'Varsity it would not be because Bartley had made a fight for him.

As he came from under the showers he saw Bartley and the coach talking earnestly. He was plying the rough Turkish towel back across his shoulders when Jenkins came down to him.

"You play against Sinclair, Mellen."

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Instantly the boy's face was radiant.  
“Thanks, Jenkins—”

“Don't thank me,” said the coach. “Thank Bartley. He thinks you'll do what you're told after this.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### MORE INSIDE BASEBALL

**G**ONE was Mellen's joy. For the moment, the fact that he was going back to the 'Varsity meant little to him. It had dawned on him that he had obediently trod the road that Bartley had marked out—he, who had hoped to outshine the captain of the nine.

"And I'll do it yet," he silently pledged.  
"So far, he's had all the luck."

Bartley had said that he would do—Mellen's blood boiled, and then suddenly cooled. There was no sense in making rash promises even to himself. He *would* do as he was told. He had had a taste of iron discipline—he had been benched. He did not want a repetition of the punishment. Yes; he would obey.

"But I'll show him up yet," the second base-

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man grunted. "He's bound to make some bone-headed plays."

As soon as Taylor had reached the gym the coach had pounced on him and had started to massage his precious arm. Now the players, for the most part, formed an admiring ring. Taylor, openly, honestly happy, laughed joyously.

"He had a drop with an inward break—'" Redway began.

"Sure," Taylor agreed. "Bartley showed me that."

"And his slow ball—'" the catcher started again.

"That's Kennedy's. He taught me."

Bartley and Kennedy stole away, and Jenkins, observing the movement, smiled again. Afterwards he came upon the two boys and threw affectionate arms across their shoulders.

"Doing anything to-night?" he asked.

The boys shook their heads.

"Come over," said the coach. "I have some new phonograph records."

## MORE INSIDE BASEBALL

To be invited to Jenkins's rooms for an evening of pleasure was a high honor at St. Mary's and one rarely bestowed.

"It can't be because the game was won," Kennedy speculated, "because I didn't play."

Bartley said nothing; but he wasn't surprised, that night, to find Taylor also at the coach's rooms.

Mellen, because of that pinch hit, was now a campus hero. Cheers were chanted in his honor, and freshmen watched him enviously, one of the surest signs of campus popularity. Despite the glory that had come to him, one thought still rankled in his mind. He had had to bow his neck to the Bartley yoke. That every other member of the 'Varsity obeyed the captain's orders without a murmur meant nothing to the star infielder.

In every game he had played in the past for the blue and gold, Mellen had gone into action supremely confident. Now, as the Sinclair game approached, he developed a strange nervousness. In practice he never seemed quite

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sure of himself, and this indecision resulted in several rank errors. Two days before the Sinclair engagement the coach, after a disastrous afternoon for the second baseman, told him not to report on the morrow.

"But I play against Sinclair, don't I?" Mellen asked.

"Certainly," Jenkins answered. "You're too finely drawn. Don't come out to-morrow afternoon."

Mellen missed the next practice, and took a long walk out into the country. The day of the game he awoke from a troubled night's sleep with the nasty thought that he did not feel right, and the thought grew as the day wore on. It reached its height in the gym. With the nine dressing for the field, Mellen discovered that his heart was beating in suffocating, fearful throbs.

"I'm losing my nerve," he thought in a panic.

"Feeling all right?" the coach asked.

"Fine," answered the boy promptly.

## MORE INSIDE BASEBALL

Jenkins was not deceived. He had been handling young athletes a long time; he could have put his finger, without hesitation, on Mel-lens trouble. He realized that the second baseman, after what had happened, was so anxious to make good, that he was in a state of dread lest he should slip up.

Redway passed, carrying a chest protector that had not yet been inflated.

"Who'll pitch?" he asked.

"Don't know," answered Jenkins. "Ken-  
nedy or Bartley."

So far as the coach was concerned, the game was already won if he wanted to play it "safe." Sinclair had the weakest hitting nine it had ever sent out. Jenkins, though, wanted to test Bartley's arm. But Bartley, in his present shape and a demoralized second baseman—

"We'll see," Jenkins sighed.

He watched Bartley warm up. The captain had better speed and better control of his curves than he had shown since the season started.

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"I'm a hero," Jenkins muttered. "I'll take a chance."

Bartley accepted the order with a nod. "Keep Kennedy's arm warm," he advised.

"Don't let Mellen bother you," Jenkins countered.

Bartley's eyes narrowed. "What is it this time?"

"He's terribly nervous; afraid he won't make good. That's all—this time."

The cheer leaders sputtered joyously as Bartley went to the box to start the game. The students, though, still remembered the Orion game—and the response didn't have the old-time ring. Bartley, intent on the work in hand, did not notice any change. Jenkins, alive to everything, longed to go into the cheering sections and bang a few heads together.

There were times before that game was over when Jenkins could have wept. Bartley was merely the shell of the old star. Sinclair's weak stickers fell upon his delivery and, clouted it far and wide. Then, too, Mellen

## MORE INSIDE BASEBALL

played miserably. Five large, glaring errors spotted his fielding, and at bat he was at the mercy of the Sinclair pitcher. The stands, long accustomed to seeing Mellen play sensational ball, could scarcely believe their eyes.

Sinclair scored seven runs, three of which were due, partly, to Mellen's errors. A ninth inning rally was all that saved St. Mary's from another defeat. Jenkins had taken his chance—and it had almost spelled ruin.

"Never again," he said; "not this season." To Bartley, though, he was all smiles. "Not bad at all, Dick," he encouraged; "you kept the swats separated. That's Christy Mathewson's specialty, you know."

Bartley shook his head. "You say it well, Jenkins. Don't neglect to keep Kennedy and Taylor in shape, though."

The coach hugged his arm. "Thank you," he said fervently.

"For what?" the captain asked.

"For Taylor."

The coach, though, found one cause for con-

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gratulation. He had warned Bartley that Mellen might play a poor game; and as a result the captain had smiled encouragement after each of the second baseman's errors.

"That should kind of knock out Mellen's grouch," Jenkins reflected.

It didn't. Mellen knew he had played the worst ball of his life. Looking back on the game, he rashly decided that Bartley, in those smiling moments following his errors, had been laughing at him.

"Has the success of the nine at heart," the second baseman raged. "Sure; that's why he laughed at me."

And then, as though some unkind Fate was stirring itself to pile up trouble for captain, coach and the nine, the campus swung around to Bartley and took the view that the captain must have known what he was doing when he benched Mellen in the Orion game.

Rumors of this added to the second baseman's bitterness. He could look back at a time when he was the star of the nine. Now

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he was marking time to the tune played by a mediocre captain, and the campus was praising the captain for putting him out of the game that his hitting had won.

Slowly his anger hardened, tightened and grew into a determination to show them that he was the star of old, and that Bartley—

He hunted up Jenkins with a cold fear tugging at his heart. "Do I play in the next game?" he demanded.

"You do," said the coach with keen understanding. "Every player has to get one bad game out of his system."

"I'll do better next time."

"Certainly, you will," Jenkins agreed heartily. "That's why I'm sending you in."

"Still a chance to square accounts with Captain Bartley," Mellen muttered as he went back to Winslow Hall. "He did right to bench me, eh?"

After that the practice on St. Mary's field saw a new type of second baseman. No longer was Mellen the barking, snappy player the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

'Varsity knew. He seldom called to any of the infielders, and in the practice games he never cooed soothing things to the pitchers when they were "in a hole." He went about his work with a hard, cold alertness.

"He's playing great ball," said Jenkins to Bartley, "but, somehow, he gives me the chills."

"I know," said the captain. "It's like those fellows you read about who start out for something and get it regardless of what it costs."

"I hope the price won't be too great," said the coach uneasily.

"What?"

"I don't know. Whatever he's after."

So came the Marshall game. Taylor pitched for St. Mary's. In the gym, before the battle, the coach talked to his nine.

"If Walker pitches," he said, "wait him out. He generally wastes a ball or two trying to fool the batter, and relies on his control if he doesn't succeed. Wait him out; wait for him to put them over. Then, kill the ball."

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Marshall came to St. Mary's with a record of having won all but one of its games. It had played a tie with Rockton.

The stands cheered the 'Varsity individually—cheered Mellen, too—but watched the second baseman critically, and decided that Jenkins's heart must be in his throat. They were wrong; it wasn't. Before the fourth inning was over the students knew what the coach had guessed for several days—that Mellen would play grand ball. On the defensive he was a stone wall; he was the only St. Mary's boy who seemed able to solve Walker. The cheering sections grew hilarious shrieking his name. His playing against Sinclair was forgotten.

Right at the start, before Taylor reached his stride, Marshall bumped him for an earned run. A double, an infield out and a single brought it across the plate. When the pitcher came to the bench the coach peeped at him anxiously, for it was the first time Taylor had been scored on so early in a game. The boy, instead of showing nervousness, smiled.

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"Won't happen again," he said; "they're through. I had everything on that last batter."

Bartley laughed, and the coach, tapping his score book, fell to humming.

"Wait him out, boys," he warned.

They waited, but the innings dragged and found them scoreless. Jenkins discovered that his collar was rasping his neck, and opened it at the throat—and any St. Mary's man could tell you that that meant that Jenkins was worried. The nine failed to score in its half of the seventh inning though Mellen had tripled with one out and the coach had sat up straight—only to slouch back on the bench again.

Taylor was holding the enemy with the skill of a veteran box artist. He blanked them once more in the first half of the eighth, leaving them with one run across eight innings of play. The nine trailed in to the bench.

"Here's where we win," cried Bartley. "No more waiting him out."

"What's that?" Jenkins demanded sharply.

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"I've been tabulating his pitches," said the captain. "He probably suspects we've been waiting him out."

"How so?"

"He's been putting the first ball right over, straight and fast."

The coach straightened up. "That's one on me. Caught me asleep, eh? You're sure of this, Bartley?"

"Positive."

"Then that's the ball to kill," said the coach briskly. "Here; who's up? Curtis! Murder that first ball, Curt. It will be straight and fast; no curve."

The third baseman went to the plate. The St. Mary's cheer was begging for action. Curtis swung at the first offering and drove it down the right field foul line for two bases.

Mellen, leaning forward, drew back and frowned.

"Now!" cried Jenkins. "If they don't wake up for a minute— Come on, Hardy; that first ball. Get it."

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Hardy crashed the first pitch up against the right field stands. Whirlwind fielding held him at third, but Curtis had come over with the tying run. Over in the cheering sections where colors of blue and gold were throwing fits, St. Mary's boys were almost falling out of the stands.

Walker, his catcher and the Marshall first baseman held a council of war half-way between the plate and the box. The stands of blue and gold barked scorn:

“Send him a letter; you’re delaying the game.”

“Hire a hall.”

“Come on, boys; nothing can save you now.”

The catcher came back, a weird, lumbering figure in his protector and shin guards. Jenkins sighed.

“They’re awake. Well, the score’s tied. Wait for what you want, boys; bring Hardy in.”

Kaufman failed, for Walker was now work-



"Hire a hall."

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ing the corners, and was not putting the first one in the groove. But Mellen poked a Texas Leaguer into short left, and the stand threatened to spill out on the field as Hardy trotted in.

Jenkins buttoned his collar. He nodded at Bartley. "You ought to be coach."

The captain flushed, and laughed.

When the ninth inning opened, Jenkins glared at Taylor. "If you let them score this time—"

"After what just happened?" grinned Taylor. "Watch me."

The coach, watching, saw him strike out the first three boys to face him. Then Jenkins found himself walking back to the gym with his arms linked in the arms of Kennedy and Bartley.

"You fellows have made a wonderful pitcher of Taylor," he said gleefully.

An eighth, or a ninth, inning victory always stirs a crowd to vast enthusiasm. The nine, dressing in the locker room, could still hear

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the noise. A tramp, tramp, tramp of feet told them that the students were parading back to the campus with the snake-like lock step.



"Mellen faced them from the doorway."

"And Bartley discovered that he was sneaking that first one over," Curtis chuckled.

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"I tell you!" roared the giant Kaufman.  
"Some captain, eh?"

"And didn't we batter him when Bartley woke up?" yelled Redway. "What a surprise party for Walker! Curt's double, and Hardy's triple— Whee!"

The joy of victory was sweeping the locker room. The nine idled lazily instead of climbing into its clothes. Jenkins, glancing about, saw the second baseman, fully dressed, on his way to the door.

"It was Mellen's hit that really won the game," said the coach. "He had to outguess Walker—and he did it."

The nine started a yell, but Mellen faced them from the doorway.

"That was an accident," he said sarcastically. He went out, and the cheering stopped.

"Ugh!" grunted Redway. "Come along, fellows; let's get back. I'm hungry. The first one dressed gets the biggest piece of steak."

There was a scramble for clothing, and Mel-

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len was soon forgotten by all except Bartley and the coach. They stared soberly at the door through which the second baseman had passed.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MISSING CATCHER

MELLEN, in the language of the campus, was "nursing a grouch." He scowled at those who tried to be friendly, and he drove from him those who did not forget that it was his hit that *had* won the game. He saw no cause for rejoicing in the victory over Marshall, and he took no part in the celebration that followed.

The second baseman felt that he was the victim of outrageous circumstances. He had made good. Yet, just when his star should have been shining the brightest, Bartley had to make a lucky discovery, and walk off with all the honors.

However, Mellen had one ray of consolation. While the nine knew what had happened on the bench, the campus was in ignorance. The nine

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had a reputation for keeping its affairs to itself. The boy hoped that Bartley's exploit would produce no change, for if either *The Eagle* or *The Patriot*, the school papers, learned of what had happened, he was sure they would become unduly excited.

*The Eagle* was the first to appear. It gave Curtis, Hardy and Mellen credit for the win. The second baseman sighed with relief. So far, all was well. That day, at the practice, he played with the speed of a healthful, fully-developed Kansas cyclone.

*The Patriot* came out two days later. Mellen bought his copy with a queer little sense of dread. On his way to a recitation, he opened it and held it so that he could scan the front page. A bank of black-faced headlines beat into his eyes:

### CAPT. BARTLEY'S BRAINS TRIUMPH OVER MARSHALL

Mellen folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He longed to crumple it, trample it

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and kick it into the gutter. Afraid of attracting attention he carried it to his class room. He found the room in something of an uproar.

"Is that true about Bartley?" demanded an excited student.

"Don't bother me," growled Mellen.

The student backed away. "What's the matter? Angry because you didn't think of it yourself?"

Mellen mumbled a reply and walked to his desk. If there was only some way of stopping Bartley—

"I'll bet," the infielder exploded, "that his father, his uncle, his cousins and his aunts all found horseshoes the day he was born."

He was beginning to hate the captain of the nine with a bitterness that was dangerous, and his hatred was all the more bitter because it had no justification.

Only two games now remained to be played—the battle with Stevenson and after that the fight with Rockton. Both captain and coach

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faced the Rockton game with less dread than earlier in the season. The nine, after a disastrous start against Orion, had settled into its stride, and now was playing good ball. Bartley's pitching began to improve wonderfully.

"Just another week!" Redway rejoiced.  
"Another week, and he'll be back."

"Good!" cried the coach. "I must use Kennedy against Stevenson, and I was worried about the Rockton game."

"Taylor could pitch that."

The coach smiled and shook his head. "A good pitcher, but this is his first year on the Varsity. He might go to pieces."

"Bartley didn't go to pieces, and he pitched against Rockton in his first year."

"Now don't you argue with me," scolded Jenkins. "Every pitcher can't be a Bartley."

"You send in Taylor if you need him," said Redway with conviction.

The Stevenson game was proof that even a coach can be happy at times. Jenkins sat on the bench and whistled, and hummed and sang

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little choruses of school songs. His nine played championship ball. Kennedy was at his best, and the infield was steady, sure, lightning fast. Four brilliant double plays featured the afternoon's work. The final score returned St. Mary's an 8 to 0 winner.

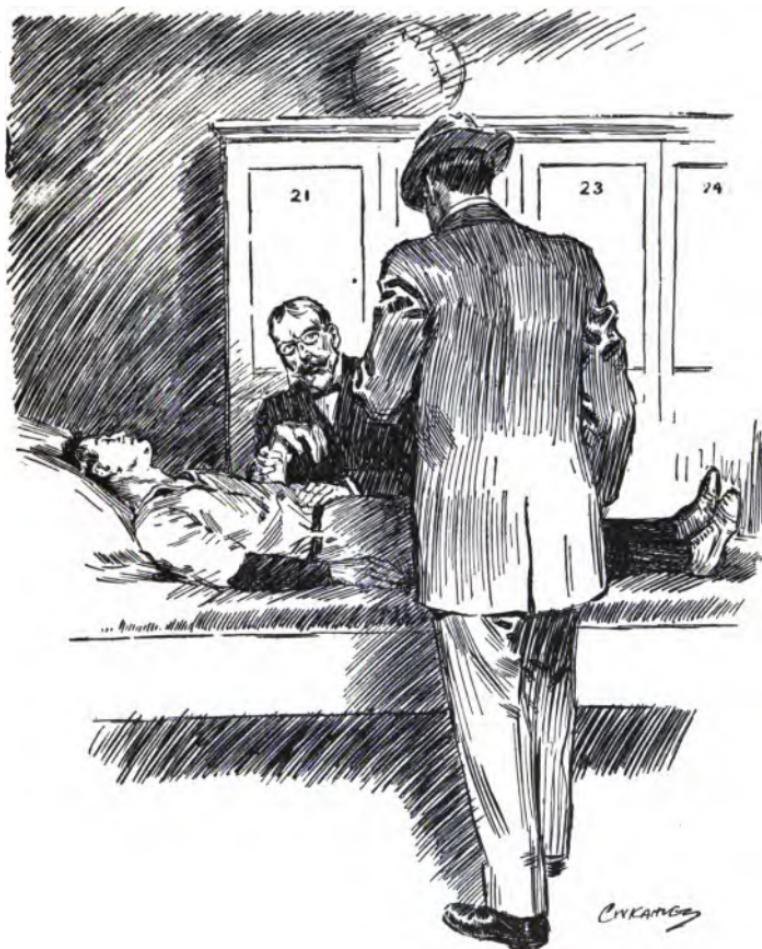
The last inning was played to a gale of cheers. Murray, catching Kennedy's delivery, grinned as Stevenson strove gallantly to escape a shut-out. The first batter was over-anxious, and struck out. The next boy splashed in front of the plate, and Murray threw him out. The last batter swung at the second ball. It twisted into the air far back of the catcher. Murray tore off his mask and went after it.

He paid no attention to where his feet led him. His eyes were on the ball.

"Can't get it," sang out Kennedy.

Murray ran on. Eight or nine bats were laid in a row in front of the Stevenson bench. Suddenly the boys on this bench sprang to their feet:

"Look out, Murray! Look out!"



"He found a bearded man bending over Murray."

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Murray, giving up the chase of the foul, saw his danger and tried to check his speed. His feet struck the bats. They jumped and rolled crazily, and the catcher pitched to the ground.

As Murray rolled over, Jenkins came running from the St. Mary's bench. The boy's right hand was twisted oddly. The coach pressed it gently, and the catcher cried out in pain. Jenkins lifted him to his feet.

"Here!" he called, and the substitutes came running. "Take him to the gym. There ought to be a doctor in the stands."

Deft hands unstrapped the chest protector. Redway took it. After a while he stepped behind the plate, and Kennedy promptly struck out the batter.

When the last strike was pitched, Jenkins was half-way to the gym. He found a bearded man bending over Murray.

"He's fainted," said the doctor.

The coach understood. "A break?"

"Yes; one of the small wrist bones. I've set it. You had better let me take him back in

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my carriage. I'll take him to my office first and put that wrist in plaster."

Jenkins nodded. The nine was piling in. The coach took Bartley and Redway aside.

"Broken wrist," he said. He faced Redway. "They tell me you're beginning to do trick work on the horizontal bars."

"A little," the boy confessed.

"Stop it. You're our only catcher now. Suppose you turn your wrist?"

"I'll stop," said Redway promptly.

The doctor and two of the substitutes walked slowly past with Murray. The injured catcher smiled feebly.

"Did Kennedy get that fellow?" he asked.

"He did," Redway grinned.

"Then it *was* a whitewash," said Murray, and passed out.

Jenkins's eyes softened. "I hope this won't stop him playing ball next spring," he sighed.

Mellen didn't show much concern over Murray's injury. In fact, he had reached that stage where only his own troubles caused him worry.

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Walking back to the campus, he overtook a group of the fellows who were discussing the game.

"Mellen was pretty good," said one, not seeing him.

"He was to-day," said another, with an air of critical approval.

Mellen turned into a side street. Pretty good! And only a short time ago he had been the infield star.

That night, with only the Rockton game left, the whole school massed on the campus. The nine was tendered an ovation, and Bartley and Jenkins were given individual shares. At the start of the season, following the Orion defeat, it had looked as though the blue and gold didn't have a chance. Now the students couldn't see how St. Mary's could loose. Time after time Bartley's name was cheered, and always with a depth of affection that made the cheer seem louder than it was.

Mellen, in his room facing the campus, listened with a feeling of personal injury. Fi-

## THE MISSING CATCHER

nally, though the night was warm, he closed his windows and partly shut out the sound.

Night after night the celebration continued. Examinations were over, and studies no longer bothered the student mind. Each afternoon, in a shrieking, noisy army, the boys tramped to the athletic field and watched the practice. Long before this the gates had been thrown open to them again. They shrilled their yells and tried out the songs that would gladden the Rockton game. Cheer leaders labored with tireless vim. Thin, pale students, with thin, pale voices, were encouraged to make as much noise as they could, anyway. If St. Mary's had given diplomas for ability to make a racket, the whole school would have graduated with honors.

Mellen, in all the boyish, happy clamor, played the same silent game that had characterized his work for more than two weeks. Each cheer that went out for Bartley seemed to cut into his foolish pride. He took to counting the cheers, and found that for every out-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

burst that sounded for him, four echoed for the captain.

Two days before the Rockton game Redway worked all afternoon with the pitchers. When he came back to the gym he hurried to the coach.

"Bartley's the same old speed merchant," he announced. "Same old break to the ball. He's fit."

"He'll work against Rockton," said Jenkins. That afternoon, for the first time that season, the nine and the substitutes and the coach came back from St. Mary's field in a body. Even Mellen seemed to feel the thrill of the big game, and instinctively came closer to the fellows.

"Let's get together to-night," cried Curtis. "There's only a few days left. Let's have to-night all to ourselves."

The nine voiced a mighty approval.

The purple spring twilight was settling as they later began to cluster at a far end of the campus fence. Mellen was there, but he stood

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off on the outskirts. Saturday came the game with Rockton. The following Monday came the graduation exercises. Four more days, and these boys who had worked three months for the honor of St. Mary's would part for the summer. Some of the nine would never return. Mellen, for instance, would graduate.

The senior class, grouped on the steps of Winslow Hall, sang the good-night song of all senior classes:

The parting hour has come,  
St. Mary's, farewell;  
Lonely are thy sons,  
St. Mary's, farewell.  
Glorious colors of gold and blue,  
Stir in our hearts thy lessons true!  
Farewell, St. Mary's; farewell, to you,  
Farewell, farewell.

The nine was silent, something of softness pulling at the heart-strings of each of the boys. Redway broke the stillness:

"I didn't think I'd be able to finish out the season. I thought my father's illness would surely call me away."

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"He's better, isn't he?" asked Jenkins.

"Very much," the catcher smiled.

Mellen, listening on the outskirts, quietly drew back and moved away.

Suddenly Curtis swung off the fence. "Come on," he called.

"Where?" asked the coach.

"The field. There's a bright moon. I want to walk around and see how the stands and the base paths look. I never have time during a game."

Jenkins laughed. He felt very tender toward his boys to-night.

"I can't go," sighed Redway. "I must write to my mother."

Jenkins patted his shoulder. "All right," he called to the others. "Start off. Not too fast."

They walked to the gym, and letting themselves in, passed the wall lined with Indian clubs and dumb-bells, went through the locker room and came out on the field. The black, silent stands were a mass of dark, forbidding

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shadows. The field itself was dim with grayish moonlight.

"Two days more," cried Curtis, and he scooped his hands along the dirt and threw an imaginary ball toward first base.

They went into the stands, their feet making hollow noises, and stared out at the diamond.

"I've been thinking—" began Dixon.

The coach turned quickly. Since the boy's failure he had been shy and almost afraid. It was a sign that his nerve was returning, to have him talk.

"What is it, Dix?" asked Jenkins.

The darkness hid the flush that crept over the substitute's face.

"It's a play," he said, "that we used to work on the lots back home. It might not be any good here."

"What is it?" asked the coach.

"When a runner who has reached second is taking a big lead, the center fielder creeps in. The catcher throws as though to get the run-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ner napping. The runner, seeing the ball go over the baseman's head, starts for third and even the coaches are sometimes fooled. The center fielder catches the ball on the fly, tosses to third and the runner finds the ball waiting for him when he slides."

"If it was worked only once in a game," mused the coach, "it might stop a run." He stood up abruptly. "Come on, fellows; we'll talk this play over with Redway, Dix."

The boys walked back to the campus. There they separated. Jenkins, Bartley and Dixon started for Redway's room.

Bartley knocked. There was no response. He pushed open the door. An exclamation came from his lips.

Jenkins thrust him aside and strode across the threshold. The room was in wild disorder. Clothing was scattered over the floor. The closet door was open, and the clothing hooks therein were bare.

"What does this mean?" the coach demanded.



**"He read it aloud, slowly."**

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Dixon pointed to the study table. A slip of yellow paper was partly under the study lamp.

"Telegram," said the boy.

Jenkins caught it up. He read it aloud, slowly:

"Father worse; come home. MOTHER."

Bartley was the first to speak. "There's pencil marks on the other side, Jenkins."

The coach turned the slip over and found a scrawled message from Redway:

I had to leave. Wanted to see you, but just had time to make 8:40 train.

The coach put the message down heavily, as though it were a vast weight.

"Gone!" he groaned. "Murray with a broken wrist, and Redway gone. Rockton will swamp us."

## CHAPTER X

### THE FIRST CLEW

THE coach, the captain and Dixon kept staring at the telegram in a despairing way.

"Some of the fellows who tried for the nine as catchers," Dixon suggested, "might possibly fill in—"

"Hopeless," said the coach. "They'd be frightened stiff every time they took a peep at the stands."

"I know," said Dixon.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. The coach sprang over and softly closed the door. A knock sounded; then somebody pushed at the door but did not budge Jenkins's knee. After that Kaufman's voice went complainingly down the hall.

"We must get out of here," said Jenkins.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"If anybody should come in they'd guess that Redway had left. Look at the room."

"We can't leave the door open," said the captain. "Somebody would be sure to walk in."

"How can we lock it?" demanded Jenkins.  
"We can't nail the door."

"Each student is given two keys," suggested Dixon. "One of the keys might be in here."

They searched through the room. Finally Jenkins found a key on a nail in the closet. It worked the lock of the door. They put out the light that Redway in his hurry had left burning, waited until the hall was quiet and then stepped outside and locked the door.

"What now?" asked Bartley.

"I want time to figure this out," the coach replied. "Your room will do."

They went upstairs. As they came in Kennedy dropped his mandolin and sprang from a chair.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Redway has left town," answered Dixon.

## THE FIRST CLEW

"I don't believe it," the big pitcher flared.  
"Redway wouldn't skip and leave us in a  
hole."

"It isn't that," said Jenkins. The coach took the telegram from his pocket, and passed it to Kennedy. The big pitcher's mouth hung open as he read.

"This means—" he began thickly.  
"We know what it means," Jenkins broke in.  
"What can we do?"

Kennedy began to automatically pound his left fist as though it were a big mitt.

"I used to catch behind the bat," he said half aloud.

The coach was all attention. "How long ago, Kennedy?"

"About five years—no; I guess it was about four years ago."

"No use. Five years without practice? You'd be a joke. They'd steal bases as fast as they got on."

"I'm willing to try," the pitcher offered.  
Nobody answered.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

The little clock in the room ticked with the clamor of pounding hammers.

"If the nine hears that Redway is gone it will go to pieces," said Jenkins at last. "Without Redway we're out of it, anyway, but I never give up until I'm whipped."

"Well?" demanded Bartley.

"Four of us know what has happened. There's no reason why five should know it."

"He might have told some of the fellows—"

Kennedy began, and the coach raised a silencing hand:

"Listen!"

They strained their ears. The noise from the rooms of Winslow Hall, with here and there a note from the outside, was all that came to their ears.

"If Redway had said anything," Jenkins announced, "the campus would be howling with excitement by this time. I must dig up a catcher somehow. If Redway's father is better the boy'll hurry back for the game. I'm sure of that much."

## THE FIRST CLEW

"How long does it take Redway to reach home?" Bartley asked.

"About eight hours. He changes at Arden."

"But even if he does come back—"

"Don't I know it!" cried Jenkins. "Sixteen hours traveling! He'd play like a fish."

Not one of the boys smiled at the comparison. Bartley dropped into a chair and stared out at the campus. Now it was calm and peaceful. Another day and a half, and he could picture the nine, humiliated, defeated, coming sorrowfully up the dormitory steps.

"I want the pitchers out early to-morrow morning," growled the coach, "and early doesn't mean 11 o'clock. I'm going to get out every fellow who thinks he can catch anything from a baseball to a cold and give him a trial."

"Will you try me behind the bat?" Kennedy asked.

"I'd try a stuffed owl," snapped Jenkins, and bolted from the room.

Dixon, after the coach was gone, shifted un-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

easily from foot to foot. He was new to school life, and a calamity like this left him helpless.

"If I can do anything—" he began lamely.

"Nothing." Bartley tried hard to smile.  
"Unless you can catch!"

"I—I can't even play second base," the boy blurted, and backed awkwardly from the room.

Bartley, alone with his room-mate, did not try now to hide his grief.

"I tried to get together a winning nine," he groaned.

Kennedy was staring at the slip of yellow paper that Jenkins had left behind.

"Did you ever get a telegram, Dick?" he asked.

"Once," answered the captain without any interest.

"Don't they fill in these little squares up near the top with numbers, and whether its paid or not, and all that?"

"I think so. Why?"

"It isn't filled in on this telegram."

## THE FIRST CLEW

Bartley, interested now, crossed the room and looked over Kennedy's shoulder.

"And the handwriting is different," he said at last. "All the telegrams I ever saw had big round loops on the g's and the y's."

Kennedy thrust the telegram into his pocket. "This looks funny to me," he said. "I'm going to investigate. Come along."

They crossed the campus, and turned toward the railroad station. All telegrams came over the railroad's wires, and a twelve-year-old boy served as the only messenger. Sitting outdoors on a bench, he was kicking his heels against the station wall as they approached. He followed them in with interest, and with not a little show of awe.

Kennedy laid the slip of yellow paper before the man who served as station agent and general telegrapher.

"Where did that telegram come from?" he asked. Then he caught himself. "If you will please tell me!"

"That isn't a telegram," said the man.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Then what is it?”

“That’s a message.”

The boys stared at each other blankly. This was something they couldn’t understand.

“Didn’t that come from this office?” Bartley asked.

“Certainly.”

“But—”

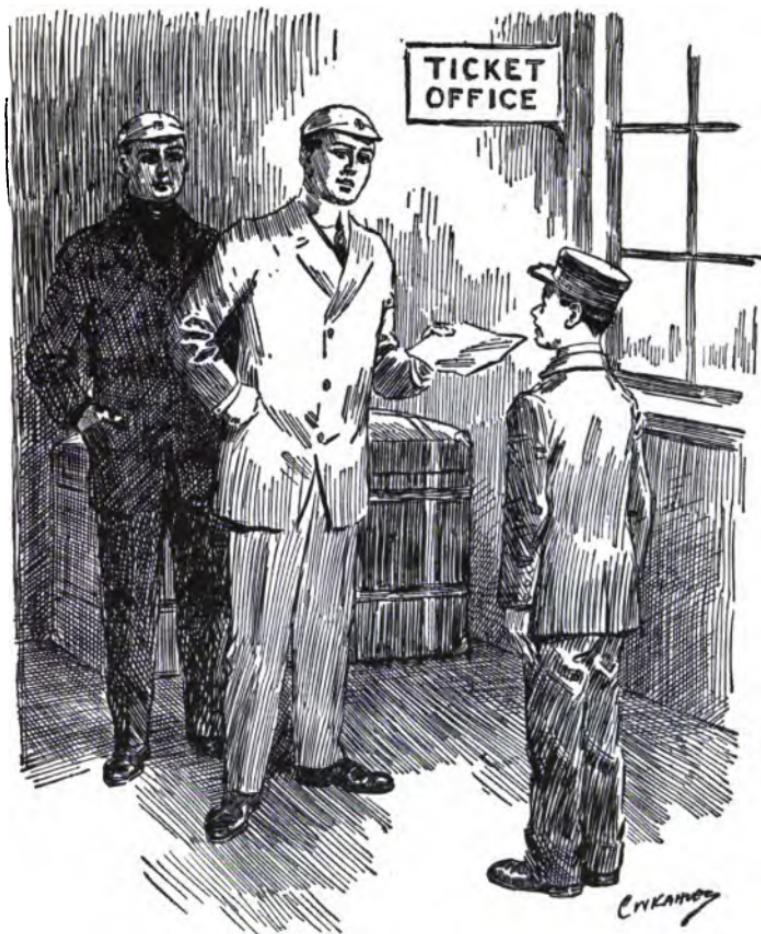
“Now, look here,” said the man, “a telegram comes in over the wires. A message does not. That’s a message.”

“Well, how did it get here—” began Kennedy excitedly.

The telegraph sounder clicked sharply. The man went to his desk, sat down and took the telegram. The captain and the big pitcher walked out into the darkness.

“I knew there was something wrong,” Kennedy cried. “If it didn’t come over the wires, it couldn’t have come from Redway’s mother. It’s a trick to get him out of the way.”

They could now sense that much. However, they were only boys, and the telegraph busi-



"Sure; I watched the fellow write it."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ness was as Greek to them. How had it been done?

The telegraph key had ceased clicking. Kennedy started back for the office.

"I'll ask him to tell me all about it," he called.

"He won't," said Bartley. "They never tell. My father told me that; he had some trouble with the company."

Kennedy came back discouraged. While they stood there, wondering what next to do, the messenger boy came out of the office and advanced toward them.

"Ain't you Bartley, the St. Mary's pitcher?" he asked.

"I am," answered the captain.

"Are you going to pitch against Rockton? I seen you last year."

Kennedy, filled with a sudden hope, pounced on the boy.

"Did you take a message to a Mr. Redway?" the big pitcher demanded.

The boy nodded. "Sure; to-night."

## THE FIRST CLEW

"Where did it come from?"

"A fellow wrote it—"

"In there!" cried Kennedy.

"Sure."

"You're positive of that?"

"Sure. Didn't I see him?"

Kennedy was almost dancing, but still Bartley felt that there might possibly be some mistake.

"Did you see what was in the message?" he asked.

"Sure; I watched the fellow write it."

The captain wet his lips. "What was it?"

"Something about his pop being sick, and—"

"Was Mellen with us when we went to St. Mary's field to-night?" demanded Kennedy suddenly.

His answer was the patter of flying feet. Bartley was running at full speed back toward the campus.

## CHAPTER XI

### A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

THE captain of the nine and his roommate were panting a bit as they crossed the campus on a run. They had come up from the station at a sprinter's pace.

"Where are you going?" Kennedy asked, a little pause after each word.

"Jenkins."

"What for?"

"We must get Redway back. If he does reach home there would be little use of him coming back; he wouldn't be in shape to play after a long train journey."

They were going up the stone steps of Winslow Hall when Kennedy clutched Bartley's arm:

"Easy. If we go in gasping and choking and demanding has anybody seen Jenkins, the whole

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

school will be following us around to find out what it's about."

So, though it was torture to do it, they waited on the stone steps until their breathing became normal. Casually they went through the building from the roof to the first floor, but none of the fellows they questioned had seen the coach. They met again on the stone steps outdoors.

"His lodgings," said Bartley, and they set off across the campus once more.

A frightened boarding mistress answered their wild, impatient clangings of her door bell. She told them severely that Mr. Jenkins was not in, and they walked slowly back to the campus. There was little use searching for the coach. Many of the students boarded with families near the school, and the coach was probably making the rounds of private houses asking fellows who thought they could catch to come out on the morrow.

"If we could reach Redway with a telegram," suggested Kennedy.

"He might think we were trying to lure him

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

back," Bartley answered. "And besides, we couldn't explain satisfactorily in a telegram."

The same thought was running through each boy's mind. Every minute that they stood there idly was taking the catcher half a mile farther from St. Mary's.

"Didn't Jenkins say something about changing cars at Arden?" Kennedy asked.

"That's it," Bartley cried suddenly. "That's our only chance. Come on."

Again the captain started off on a run. Kennedy charged along at his heels.

"What is it?" the pitcher demanded.

"We can telephone to Arden," Bartley flung back over his shoulder. "We'll catch him when his train pulls in."

"Where are you going?"

"To the station. I want to use their telephone."

"But the station closes after the 9:20 goes through. What time is it?"

Still running, the captain plucked at his

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

watch. Then came the noise of a locomotive, and then the moving lights of a train.

"Too late," gasped Kennedy.

However, they did not slacken their pace. They turned into the road leading to the station. The station lights should have been blinking at them, but ahead all was blackness. Another moment and they came upon the agent walking rapidly toward them.

"May I use the telephone?" Bartley gasped.

"Station's closed," said the man.

"But this is important," the captain insisted. "We'll lose the Rockton game if I can't telephone to Arden."

"There are other telephones in the village."

"They're not public 'phones."

"You're a St. Mary's student?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Norton has a telephone; use that."

This was something that Bartley did not want to do. If the truth must be told he stood in some slight awe of the fine old gentleman who was principal of St. Mary's. Besides, he rea-

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soned that if he used Dr. Norton's telephone he would have to explain all about the telegram, and he was not a bearer of tales.

There was something about the man's attitude that spelled more than a surly refusal to accommodate. Suddenly the captain remembered that he had heard tales of a band of rowdy students who had once thought it fine fun to snowball the agent. The boy turned away with a sigh.

Kennedy, however, was not yet ready to give up hope. A new plan had formed in his mind.

"What time does the 8:40 train get to Arden?" he asked.

"About 10:10," the agent replied.

"Thank you." The pitcher turned to Bartley: "I don't know the road to Richfield—at least, not at night. Do you?"

The captain nodded. "Why?"

"The summer hotel there is open until midnight. You could use their telephone."

Bartley swung around. "How could I get there?"

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

"I'll run back and borrow Curtis's bicycle. I'll be waiting for you on the campus."

The pitcher dashed off in the darkness. Bartley made a trumpet of his hands:

"See that there's oil in the lamp. The roads will be pretty dark."

Long before the captain reached the campus a bright, moving light told him that Kennedy and the bicycle were waiting. While he straddled the saddle, the pitcher clamped metal guards about his trouser legs.

"I oiled it," said Kennedy. "Put graphite on the chain, too."

Bartley was ready to mount. "What time is it?"

"Fifteen to ten. Can you make it?"

"I must," said the captain, and was off.

The lamp threw a bright radiance ahead. The first minute or two the way was smooth. He swung into the road leading to Richfield, and at once became conscious of the ruts.

Over this rough thoroughfare the boy made as much speed as he dared. It dawned on him

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that should anything happen to his light, he had no matches. Anyway, it was now too late to turn back. On either side of him a soft breeze made ghostly music in the branches of the lonely trees. Now that he was out of sight of the campus and the school buildings and alone on the dark road, little chills began to go up and down his back. His eyes, though, never once left the white semicircle of light that wavered ahead.

Soon he decided that he must make better time. Speed on such a road at night was dangerous, yet he worked his legs faster. Almost instantly the front wheel struck a sharp depression and bounced, and almost without warning the lamp flickered and went out.

Something like a sob caught in the captain's throat. A heavy blackness closed in around him. Instinctively his pace slackened. Then came a thought of Redway gone, and the Rockton game lost. With a desperate thought that he must take chances of mishap, he pushed violently at the pedals.

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

"If I hit anything—" he gasped, and gripped the handle-bars as he felt the jostle of a ragged rut.

After that the ride became a nightmare. His eyes were straining at the darkness and seeing nothing. After a while his imagination began to picture rocks and the trunks of trees directly ahead, and that was agony. Yet he kept plugging doggedly at the pedals, and was totally unconscious that tears were running down his cheeks.

So he kept on through the night. It seemed that it was hours since he had left Kennedy. Would he ever reach the hotel? Would he get there too late? Suppose the train to which Redway changed pulled out right after the arrival of the 8:40?

A turn in the road that he made by instinct—and there, far up ahead, a light flared dully. The boy's heart leaped. At last he was approaching Richfield.

The light came toward him, but, oh, so slowly. Finally he passed it. Where was the hotel? He

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could hear music—mellow, measured dance music. He followed the sound.

Men, sitting on the hotel porch, saw a boy ride to the wide steps, spring from a bicycle and leave it to fall where it would.

“Is this the hotel?”

“This is it, sonny,” called a cheery voice.

The captain of the nine went up the steps, across the porch and into the hotel office.

“Telephone?” he gasped.

He saw the instrument before the question was answered, and quickly had the receiver off the hook.

“Number, please?” asked a voice.

He remembered then that he did not know the number; but perhaps Central did.

“I want the railroad station at Arden,” he called.

“There are two depots at Arden. I’ll give you information.”

Two railroad stations at Arden! Bartley’s eyes saw the office clock—10.08. In two minutes Redway’s train would be in, and—

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

"What's the matter?" asked the same cheery voice that the captain had heard on the porch.  
"In trouble?"

The two minutes were passing. The voice, though, seemed to soothe. Harassed, bewildered at this new turn of affairs, Bartley, almost without knowing it, found himself pouring his tale into older ears.

"I must get a fellow, or we'll lose the biggest game of the season. He changes cars at Arden—"

"For where?" asked the voice, sharply now.

"Detroit."

"Where did he board the train—what station?"

"St. Mary's."

"What time is the train due at Arden?"

"At 10:10."

It was now almost 10:09. The boy knew it almost without looking at the clock. The man reached for the telephone directory hanging under the instrument.

"We won't wait for information," he said.

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"He's now on a Central Western train—that's the road that runs past St. Mary's. The train for Detroit leaves from the Northern Michigan depot. We must hurry, mustn't we?" His fingers went rapidly down a page. "We want the public telephone at the Central Western depot. Ah! That's the number. You're not used to a telephone, sonny; let me use it."

Almost before he knew it, Bartley was away from the 'phone. He heard the man's voice:

"Hello, Central. Never mind information. Arden, 500. Hurry, please. This is important."

The clock ticked away three or four valuable seconds. The man spoke without turning his head:

"Who do you want, sonny?"

"Redway—Charles Redway."

This time the man half swung around. "The St. Mary's catcher?"

"Yes, sir."

A silence settled over the office, and the hotel clerk turned a page in a ledger. The paper

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

rustled noisily. Bartley's eyes were fastened on the moving second hand of the big clock. It



“‘Who do you want, sonny?’”

seemed to race. Would the answer never come?  
Then the man spoke crisply:

“Hello! Arden, 500? Has the train arrived

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

that passes St. Mary's! Just in? There's a passenger on it—Charles Redway. A boy about seventeen. Get him to the telephone, please, if you have to carry him. I'll hold the wire. Thank you."

And now a new fear came to the captain of the nine. The train had arrived. Suppose Redway slipped away in the crowd. The boy had seen messengers sent out from public telephones in railroad depots to catch persons. Often they failed. Suppose they didn't find Redway— His breath caught in his throat.

Slowly the minutes passed. Bartley, nervously twitching his fingers, was conscious that the man was watching him. To the captain's mind the delay could only mean that Redway could not be found. For the first time in his life he realized what is meant by "cold sweat." He wet his lips, and wondered at their dryness.

"If they missed him—" he began.

"Hello!" called the man's voice. "This you, Redway?" Bartley's heart went into his throat.

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

Then: "Hold the wire." The man turned around. "Here you are, sonny."

Hungrily the boy clutched at the receiver, and when he spoke into the mouthpiece his voice shook with excitement:

"Hello, Redway! This is Bartley. Oh, I'm glad I caught you. We found the telegram. You must come back."

"And my father dying, perhaps," came a faintly indignant voice over the wire. "I didn't think this of you, Dick."

"But he isn't," shouted the captain in his eagerness. "We investigated. That telegram never came from Detroit."

"It did," faintly from over the wire. "Didn't I see it?"

"Yes; but Kennedy and I investigated. Somebody wrote the message in the St. Mary's office; we saw the agent. It's a fake message to get you out of the game. It is, Redway; it is. We've investigated."

A long silence. At last that same faint voice: "You're not fooling me, Dick!"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Fooling you?" the captain almost sobbed. "Do you think I'd tell you this if your father were really ill?" Then the sob became a shout of joy. "What! You'll come back on the first train? Good! I'll tell Jenkins. Oh, I'm glad I caught you, Redway!"

A trembling boy, his nerves a-flutter now that the suspense was over, backed away from the telephone. The hotel clerk, silent up to this time, tapped his desk.

"One dollar and forty cents charges," he announced.

The captain of the nine suddenly felt a little thrill of fright. He had forgotten that long distance telephoning is expensive, and he had less than one dollar. He had heard of men being arrested for not paying hotel board bills, and perhaps they arrested persons for not paying telephone charges, too. It wasn't a comforting thought.

"I haven't that much—" he began weakly.

"Guess I'll have to pay it and help you out again, sonny," said the cheery voice.

## A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

"I'll pay you back," cried Bartley, "just as soon—"

"Pay me at the game Saturday," smiled the man.

"Are you coming?"

"Couldn't keep me away," and this time the man laughed.

Bartley remembered how the man had asked him if Redway was the St. Mary's catcher, and how, when speaking over the telephone, he had given Redway's age. The captain thought he knew the reason for the other's kindness.

"You're a St. Mary's man," he announced, with a feeling of pride that it was so.

"Wrong!" was the answer. "I'm for Rockton."

"Here's your change, Mr. Caldwell," called the hotel clerk.

The name sent a staggering thought crashing through Bartley's mind.

"Are you related to 'Hooks' Caldwell, the Rockton pitcher?" he demanded.

"He's my boy, sonny."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"He's going to pitch against us Saturday, isn't he?"

"I hope so."

"We wouldn't have a chance without Redway," said Bartley. "I guess you knew that, didn't you?"

"I did; Murray's injured, isn't he? And I thought I recognized you when you came up the steps; that's why I followed you in. I can tell you the batting average of every boy on your nine. You take a lot of interest in such things when your boy's on the other side. I keep posted. But there isn't much fun in winning on a fluke, is there, sonny?"

Bartley shook his head. His eyes were on the ground. A Rockton man helping St. Mary's to get back its star catcher! Suddenly he looked up and held out his hand.

"If we can't win," he said soberly, "I want you to know that I hope 'Hooks' Caldwell is the pitcher who beats us."

## CHAPTER XII

### FINDING THE CULPRIT

BEFORE leaving the hotel Bartley lighted his bicycle lamp. This time he did not forget to put matches in his pocket. He had broken one of the school rules in being out of his room after ten o'clock, but as Commencement was only a few days off, this did not give him much concern.

Now that Redway would be back in the morning, and his mind was no longer troubled, the captain began to dread the ride home. Nevertheless, feeling that the sooner he started the sooner it would be over, he set forth on the return journey with a courage he did not feel.

The captain of the nine hummed snatches of song as he rode, and tried to keep his mind off the black shadows on either side of him. He had gone one-third of his distance when a light

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

appeared ahead, and drew steadily nearer. The boy recognized it as the glow from a bicycle lamp. Who could be abroad at such an hour?

The captain knew it was the time of year when tramps take to the country. If this were a tramp approaching he must have stolen the wheel he rode, and that was not a consoling reflection.

Bartley would have dismounted, drawn to the side of the road and let the unknown wheelman go past were it not for the fact that his own lamp must ere this have betrayed him. He pedalled on, resolved to sprint if there was any sign of trouble. The other light came closer. Suddenly a question came out of the darkness:

“That you, Bartley?”

Never had a voice fallen sweeter on the boy’s ears. He rode forward boldly.

“Right, Jenkins.”

“Kennedy told me. I didn’t like this thing of having you on dark roads, so I followed.”

## FINDING THE CULPRIT

"I didn't like it myself," said the boy in a burst of confidence. "I—I was rather scared."

"I don't wonder," said the coach, and frowned at the black walls of trees on either side. Abruptly his voice changed. "Did you get Redway?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At Arden."

"And?"

"He's coming back."

"Ah!" and in that the captain caught a glimpse of what must have been tearing at the coach's heart.

The road where they met was narrow. Jenkins dismounted and turned his wheel around. After that they rode side by side, and Bartley related how a Rockton man had helped him reach Redway.

"'Hooks' Caldwell's father, eh?" said the coach. "I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I think Caldwell will pitch, and it will be

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

rubbing it in to beat him with his father looking on."

"I understand he's a wonder," mused the captain.

"Nonsense!" said the coach sharply. "We'll bat him all over the lot."

But deep down in his soul Jenkins was wondering whether his boys would be able to do much with Rockton's left-handed star.

At last they came to the campus. A form ran out to meet them.

"Get him!" Kennedy demanded.

"Didn't I tell you to go to bed?" snapped the coach. "What kind of shape will you be in Saturday losing sleep this way?"

"I couldn't sleep if I tried, Jenkins. Did you get him?"

"Yes; Bartley got him."

"Is he coming back?"

"He is."

"Well," Kennedy sighed, "that's settled. Now we must find the skunk who sent that telegram."

## FINDING THE CULPRIT

All the way back Jenkins had been hoping that this thought would not come to either Kennedy or Bartley. He wanted them to sleep as do tired, healthy boys and not to toss on restless pillows the greater part of the night.

"I'll find out in an hour to-morrow," he said confidently.

His tone was so cocksure that even Kennedy was fooled. "Good!" he cried. "That had me worried."

To make sure that the big pitcher and the captain would go to bed at once, the coach entered Winslow Hall with them. A dim light burned on each landing; the building was very still. Carefully they tiptoed their way upstairs. They were passing Curtis's room when the door opened a bit, and Curtis stood revealed in his pajamas.

"What's the matter?" he whispered, not seeing the coach. "What do you fellows mean borrowing my bicycle and flying around—"

"You awake, too?" hissed Jenkins, and the

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

third baseman closed the door and fled back to his bed.

"Undress in the dark," the coach ordered when they were all in the captain's room. "We can't risk having somebody see a light."

When they were in bed Jenkins moved toward the door. "I'll stay out in the hall a while," he growled. "I'll be listening. If I hear you fellows talking—"

Kennedy sighed, and composed himself for sleep. The coach heard the sigh, and in the darkness a smile ran across his face.

Next morning Kennedy was the first to waken. The room was bathed in sunlight, and the sounds from the campus told him plainly that it was well past his usual rising hour. He reached over and shook Bartley. The captain opened his eyes and blinked at the light.

"Get up," Kennedy commanded. "We must find the fellow who sent that message."

Bartley tumbled from the bed. For the next half-hour there was a great splashing of water and a great bustle of getting into clothing.

## FINDING THE CULPRIT

They were carelessly adjusting cravats when Jenkins walked in.

"Redway back yet?" Bartley asked.

The coach nodded. "Since six o'clock."

"Rather early, wasn't it?" asked Kennedy.

"Well," said the coach, "Redway has brains. He figured we'd keep this thing quiet, so he left Arden on the first train, not caring to have any of the fellows see him leave a train at this station with a suit case."

"He must need sleep," Kennedy commented.

"He's getting it," said Jenkins.

The captain broke into the conversation. "But won't the fellows suspect something if Redway sleeps in his room until—"

"He's sleeping in my rooms," said the coach.

"He came to me as soon as he arrived."

From the campus came the bustle that precedes a big game. Jenkins frowned. One of St. Mary's boys was a traitor.

"I'm hungry," cried Kennedy. "After breakfast we'll find the sender of that message."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"We won't," said the coach. "I've tried." Kennedy was astonished. "But last night you said—"

"The agent at the station won't open his lips," said Jenkins ruefully. "I explained that it had been sent in an effort to hurt our chances in the Rockton game; I guess he's sorry it didn't succeed. I'd like to have my hands on the fellows who snowballed him."

"Mellen—" Kennedy began.

"None of that," the coach warned. "There's no way of proving who sent the message. It isn't the square thing to accuse when you can't prove anything."

"But he didn't go to the field last night—"

"That doesn't indicate guilt."

"Just the same," Kennedy insisted, "we could tax him with it and—"

"And have him go into the Rockton game grouchy and sore!"

"He'll be grouchy, anyway," the big pitcher grumbled.

The coach made no reply to this, and soon

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left. The big dining room in the basement of Winslow Hall was closed by this time, and the boys paraded off to a restaurant. They ordered coffee, rolls and eggs, and while eating, decided that they had never before realized the excellence of the food the school dining room provided.

"Looks like rain," said Bartley, with an eye to what weather would be served the nine on the morrow.

"Tastes like it, too," growled Kennedy, and pushed away his coffee cup.

By this time the advance army of St. Mary's graduates was beginning to arrive, bringing with it a monstrous collection of flags of blue and gold. When the boys reached the campus they found it a small riot of life, of color and of sound.

Dixon, trying hard to conceal his anxiety, met them on the steps of Winslow Hall.

"Has Jenkins found a catcher?" he asked.

"Redway's back," murmured Kennedy.

Dixon tossed his cap into the air. Then

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

he remembered that he had a message to deliver:

"There's a telegraph boy looking for you, Dick."

Bartley and Kennedy exchanged glances. Another message! What was it this time?

They tramped up the stairs. No boy was in sight. They pushed open their room door. The messenger boy from the station, sprawled off in a chair, was making himself at home.

"Who told you to come in here?" Kennedy snapped.

"I wasn't going to sit on the stairs," said the messenger, not in the least abashed. "The door was open, so I came in."

"Have you a message?"

"Sure."

"For whom?"

"Bartley."

The captain came forward. "I'll sign for it."

"It isn't that kind of message," the boy confessed, and Kennedy bristled.

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"What kind of bunco game is this?" he demanded.

Bartley, though, scented that something of interest was on the messenger's mind.

"Well, son," he said, "let's have it."

The boy pointed to Kennedy. "In front of him?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes. He's all right."

"Huh!" grunted the messenger. "Close the door."

Kennedy obeyed the order. The boy sunk his voice to a hoarse whisper.

"A man was at the station this morning," he began. "He wanted to know who sent that message to Redway. He said he was the chief cook of the baseball nine. Is that so?"

Bartley nodded. "Yes."

"He said some lad was trying to queer the nine—the lad what sent the message. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well," whispered the messenger, "I don't like no game like that. I'm on the level, I am.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

The agent wouldn't tell him anything; he is sore, the agent is. But if you want to know—”

Kennedy was across the room. “Who was it?”

“Huh!” said the messenger. “I'm talking to this other fellow. It was that lad what plays second base—”

“Mellen!” demanded Kennedy in a voice that rose to a trembling pitch.

“That's the lad.”

This time Bartley spoke. “You're sure?”

“Ain't I seen him play? I'm a St. Mary's fan, I am. I've seen you pitch, Bartley; you're the goods. You won't tell Sam Stack—that's the agent—that I was here!”

“Won't tell him a thing,” said the captain fervently.

Kennedy followed the messenger to the door. “Kid,” he said, “you're a brick.”

The boy seemed pleased. “Oh, that's all right,” he protested. “I couldn't stand for a game like that. I'm on the level, I am.”

Kennedy and Bartley heard him go clatter-

## FINDING THE CULPRIT

ing down the stairs. From the campus came a snatch of the old St. Mary's war song:

Hail ye true and loyal sons,  
Stout of heart, in danger strong—

"Mellen!" muttered Kennedy. "*He* was true and loyal, wasn't he? Come on, Bartley. We must find Jenkins."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SENTENCE

**T**HIS time Bartley and Kennedy gained admittance to the coach's house without arousing the wrath of the boarding mistress. As they came to Jenkins's rooms a great yawning arose inside. They pushed open the door. Redway, his red hair bristling with the disorder of sleep, was standing in the doorway leading to an inner room and stretching with evident enjoyment.

"Hello, Paul Revere!" he called to Bartley. "What's the good word?" Then he saw Kennedy. "And how's Sherlock Holmes? Pretty slick of you, Kennedy, to notice it wasn't a real telegram."

Neither Bartley nor Kennedy answered the catcher's smile. This in itself was alarming. Redway ceased his friendly banter.

## THE SENTENCE

“What’s up?” he asked.

“Where’s Jenkins?” Kennedy demanded.

“I don’t know; I just woke up. What’s the excitement?”

“We know who sent that fake telegram.”

Neither the captain nor the big pitcher was paying much attention to Redway, and they did not see the gleam that sprang into his eyes.

“Who was it?” he asked carelessly.

“Mellen,” said Kennedy.

Redway plunged headlong into the other room, and the two boys gasped. They heard water running, and after that came a steady, strong splashing. The catcher’s voice gurgled out at them:

“Mellen, eh? Well, when I get my hands on Mr. Mellen he’ll think he’s sliding to bases on his ear.”

The splashing ceased. The catcher came back manipulating a towel over neck, ears and face. At length the towel was unceremoniously flung aside to fall where it would, and the boy caught up his soft Madras shirt.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“Just give me ten minutes with Mr. Mellen; just ten—”

“My!” came Jenkins’s voice from the doorway leading to the hall. “What a blood-thirsty young pirate! And why are you so anxious to meet him?”

“He sent me that fake telegram.”

The coach came into the room and shut the door with a savage kick of his foot. “Who said so?”

“Kennedy.”

“I thought as much.” Jenkins’s eyes were blazing. “Didn’t I tell you to keep a still tongue so far as Mellen was concerned?”

“He did it,” said the big pitcher doggedly.

“What’s that?”

“He did it. I know it now.”

“Who told you?”

“The messenger boy.”

“What messenger boy?”

“The one from the station.”

“How does he know?”

“He was at the station when Mellen wrote

## THE SENTENCE

the message. He knows Mellen; he's seen him play.”

The coach sat down in the nearest chair. “Give me the whole story,” he ordered. “Out with it!”

Kennedy explained how he and Bartley had found the messenger boy in their room, and of the story the boy had told. When Kennedy finished, Redway, now fully dressed, started for the hall door.

“I'll find Mellen,” he vowed, “and when I do—”

The coach did not leave his chair. “Have you lost your head, too?” he snapped.

Redway faced about. “Why—er—”

“Is that the best you can say? Very intelligent; very. What brought you here at six o'clock this morning?”

“I didn't want the fellows to know.”

“And now, with the place alive with visitors, you want to go out and give a public exhibition on the campus. Is that your idea?”

The boy came away from the door. “I didn't

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

think of that, Jenkins," he confessed; but, nevertheless, his eyes were still snapping.

"*I'll get Mellen,*" said the coach. "I'll bring him here, too."

He was gone. The three boys stared at one another and found that it was easier to keep silent tongues than to talk. Outside, a great cheer arose. They heard the cheer swell into an organized cry:

"Turner! Turner! Turner!"

The greatest pitcher that the blue and gold had ever known had come down to see the game. The cheers were in recognition of his worth. So did St. Mary's honor her faithful sons.

After a while they heard the pounding of feet on the stairs and voices—Mellen's laugh and Jenkins's deep bass. The coach was talking cheerily. Bartley sent a surprised glance at Kennedy, and both stole a look at Redway.

"What does this mean?" asked the catcher.

Mellen appeared in the doorway. Instantly his face went white.

"Go in," said Jenkins pleasantly.

## THE SENTENCE

The second baseman tried to draw back. The next moment he half sprawled into the room propelled by the coach's sturdy right arm. Jenkins followed, and closed the door.

"There he is," said the man grimly. "I haven't told him yet. I was afraid he wouldn't come, and I didn't want to drag him in."

Mellen was standing straight now. He turned a bit so that he would not have to look at Redway.

"What's the meaning of this?" he sputtered.

"Tell him, Kennedy," said the coach.

"You faked a telegram to Redway," the big pitcher cried, "so that we'd lose the Rockton game—"

"I didn't," Mellen flashed back.

"You didn't send Redway a message?"

"I didn't try to throw the Rockton game."

"What did you try to do?"

"I wanted a crack at Bartley. He hasn't treated me right. He's been hounding me—"

"Stop that!" roared the coach; and Bartley,

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

remembering the crowd on the campus, went over and closed the windows.

"He hasn't treated me right," growled the second baseman sullenly.

"He's treated you better than you deserved," cried Jenkins. "He should have dismissed you from the squad. I know what's been going on. I've been a fool. Bartley wanted to hold you because of your playing, and I allowed him to do it. I should have kicked you out of the gym. And now, at the finish, you try to throw the big game—"

"I didn't," Mellen insisted. "I didn't think of that until afterwards. I knew if Redway was out Bartley would be up against it—"

"And the nine, too." The coach's voice was hard.

"I wasn't thinking of the nine. I was after Bartley. He tried to put Dixon in my place."

"I wish he had," Jenkins snapped.

A chair scraped along the floor. Mellen glanced up and then began to back away.

"That's right," shot out Redway. "Far-



"'You don't deny you sent that telegram?'"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ther! Don't stop until you reach the wall. I'm trying hard not to go at you, but I might forget myself."

The coach moved forward where he could reach the catcher in an instant. Kennedy moved closer, too. Redway scowled at these preparations to stop him.

"You don't deny you sent that telegram?" he demanded.

Mellen hesitated. "No," he said at last.

Redway took a step forward. Instantly the coach and Kennedy caught him.

"Steady!" called the coach.

"Do you know what that message meant to me, Jenkins?" asked the catcher in a broken voice. "When it came, I— All the way on the train I could imagine my father dying and my mother there alone with none to comfort her. I tell you, it was agony. And that brute sent it."

This time he sprang. Mellen cowered in fear. The coach, though, had expected something like this. His arms closed around Redway's body.

## THE SENTENCE

"Steady!" he called again softly and kindly. "I understand, Redway. What good will it do to hit him?"

"None," said the catcher, and ceased to struggle. For a while there was silence, and he stood there with the coach's grip still on him. "Take them away, Jenkins," he said. "I won't harm him."

Without hesitation the coach's arms came away.

"But I'm not through with you, Mellen," cried Redway. "You'll never take a diploma from St. Mary's. You'll never disgrace the school by showing a paper that claims you as a graduate. I'm not a tale bearer; you all know that. But you did a thing, Mellen, so cruelly wrong, that I cannot forget it. I'm going to Dr. Norton, and I'll tell him the whole story. When the diplomas are given out Monday your name will not be on the list. I'll have you expelled—"

"No!" cried Mellen suddenly. His voice became pleading. "No; not that."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“No? Why not?”

“My mother—she’s coming down to see me graduate, and—”

“Your mother,” said Redway.

The catcher stared steadily at the rug on the floor as though he was committing its pattern to memory.

“Your mother,” he repeated at last. “I remember her. She was here the time you debated. A sweet little woman—just like my mother. If you’re expelled, you’ll get over it in a few weeks, but she’ll always feel the blow. It isn’t fair to make a good mother suffer that way. I—I won’t tell Dr. Norton.”

Jenkins’s eyes began to blink, and he turned his head away. Then Redway’s voice came again, and now the gentleness was gone from it.

“But you don’t play to-morrow, Mellen. I won’t stand for it. I’m sorry, Bartley. I know how badly you want to win this game—”

“He doesn’t play,” said the captain, and turned toward the coach. “He doesn’t play, Jenkins.”

## THE SENTENCE

"He doesn't play," agreed the coach slowly.

Mellen, silent during this dialogue, found his voice. "I'm glad you're not telling Dr. Norton, Redway."

The catcher turned his back and walked toward the windows. Mellen, his head hanging, went toward the door.

"Stop!" called Jenkins. "You've sprained your wrist."

"I haven't."

"You have," roared the coach. "You go right to your room—and stay there. I'll come over this afternoon and bandage your wrist. Then, if any of the fellows want to know why you're not playing—"

The idea dawned on Mellen. "Thank you, Jenkins."

"I don't want your thanks. I'm not trying to make it easier for you; I'd like to break every bone in your body. You're a disgrace to St. Mary's. But Redway's right. Your mother—Here, get out of here."

After he had gone, Jenkins sat down at his

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

desk and pulled from their rack the books that told the fielding and batting averages of his players—the books that the school called “the grand old dope.”

“To-morrow,” he sighed, “we face Rockton. Dixon must play second base. His batting average is .000. He has the grand fielding average of .492. And those fellows out there are cheering for a blue and gold victory.”

Bartley laid a steady hand on the man’s shoulder. “He can play ball, Jenkins.”

“Bah!”

“He can. The trouble is, he’s lost his nerve. They took it from him in the Orion game. He must find his courage again, and we must help him find it.”

“How long do you think we have?” asked the coach sarcastically; “a year?”

“We have all afternoon,” said the captain.

“As long as that!” the man mocked.

“All afternoon,” repeated Bartley. “St. Mary’s isn’t licked yet.”

Slowly the coach put back the books. As the

## THE SENTENCE

last one went into the rack he fell to whistling.

"Richard the Lion-hearted!" he said affectionately. "You're right, Dick; we *have* all afternoon. Come on."

## CHAPTER XIV

### DOCTORING AN INFILDER

ALKING in a laughing group—the coach had ordered the laugh—Jenkins, Bartley, Redway and Kennedy went across the campus. Students, basking on the warm steps, raised a cheer as they passed inside.

They found Dixon working oil into his infielder's glove. His eyes opened in surprise when they walked in on him.

"You play to-morrow," said the coach carelessly.

"To-morrow?" Dixon repeated as though he was afraid he had not understood.

"Certainly; why not?"

"What's the matter with Mellen?"

"Sprained wrist. In you go, Dixon."

The substitute infielder fumbled with his

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

glove. They could plainly see his fingers twitching.

"Why," he stammered, "I fell down so badly in the Orion game—"

"Ah!" said the coach lightly, "that was the Orion game. That was two months ago. I've been watching you; you've improved a lot since then."

"You certainly have," chimed in Bartley.

Still Dixon continued to fumble with his glove. Some of the twitching, though, had left his fingers.

"If I should fall down again—" he began.

"Nonsense!" laughed the coach. "Do you think I'd pick you if you couldn't make good—and the Rockton game at stake?"

That seemed to be logical, anyway. Dixon's eyes brightened.

"Do you know, Jenkins," he confessed, "I often wondered whether you'd ever play me in the big game."

"Even if Mellen hadn't been put out of business," Jenkins smiled unblushingly, "I was

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

thinking of giving you a chance in to-morrow's game."

"Were you?" questioned Dixon eagerly.

"I was. What did you tell me yesterday about Dixon, Bartley?"

The captain came to the rescue royally. "Why," he said, "I told you I thought Dixon would develop into the best second baseman we had ever had."

Dixon's eyes shone gratitude. "That's fine of you, Bartley." His face clouded. "But my batting—"

"I have been watching that, too," grinned the coach. "I know what you can do. That's why I'm playing you to-morrow."

"Why," broke in Kennedy, "the last time he batted against me in practice he had me guessing every minute."

"I struck out twice," Dixon corrected.

"Certainly," Kennedy agreed quickly. "But you had me pitching my head off. I was shot full of luck to get away with it."

"Yes," added Redway, "and I was catching,

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and when he did miss the ball it was only by a fraction of an inch."

"I thought I was missing them a mile," breathed Dixon.

"A mile!" scoffed Redway. "Had you come any closer we would have had to move back the fence."

The substitute infielder stood up and joyously stretched his arms.

"If I could get a little practice to-day, Jenkins—"

"Certainly. This afternoon at two o'clock."

"Make it one o'clock," Dixon begged. "I won't have so long to wait."

Out in the hall, the coach smiled genially on Redway, Kennedy and Bartley.

"Well?" questioned the captain. "What do you think of it now?"

"He'll do," answered Jenkins. "Here's the key to your room, Redway. Only the infielders practice this afternoon—and closed gates."

"Shall I tell the fellows?" asked Bartley.

"No; I'll dig them up. Two o'clock, mind.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

We want the pitchers, too. We'll give him some batting practice."

The coach walked away jauntily. His face, though, once he was out of sight of the boys, seemed suddenly lined with care.

He went to the room of Kaufman, the giant first baseman.

"What's this I hear about Mellen?" Kaufman demanded.

"What is it you hear?"

"Is his wrist gone?"

"It is."

"Who plays?"

"Dixon."

The first baseman threw up his hands in a gesture of despair. "That settles it."

"It doesn't," barked Jenkins. "If I hear any more of that talk, I'll bench you and take a chance on Eastwood. All Dixon ever lacked was confidence. Turn out this afternoon. We'll give him some infield practice. And if you forget to tell him he's the best you ever saw, I'll have your life. You hear me?"

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

Kaufman grasped the coach's arm. "Is there a chance?"

"Of Dixon making good?"

"That's what I mean."

"There's a big chance."

"I'm with you," said Kaufman quietly. "St. Mary's still has a chance, too."

"A chance!" growled the coach. "Wake up! We'll win."

Back in his rooms at last after having told Curtis and Taylor, Jenkins paced the floor with restless steps. To lose the star player of his infield twenty-four hours before the big game—He had tried hard, but he could not forget the game Dixon had played against Orion. He did not believe, had never believed, that St. Mary's fellows had hooted Dixon that day. It must have been some boys from the town who had come in to see the game, and who had no school tradition to make them loyal to the boy who was playing a poor game.

But suppose the stands should treat Dixon with coolness? The coach shuddered. After

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

that he resolutely pushed the thought aside. There was no sense in looking for trouble. If it was on its way, it would arrive soon enough.

From outside the house came a clamorous noise. The coach went to the windows. An army of students was gathered in the street below.

"So!" said the coach; "they've heard."

He was ready when a committee of three came upstairs.

"Is Mellen out?" they asked.

"He is," Jenkins smiled.

They shook their heads sadly. "Well, we'll put up a fight, anyway."

"Fight!" howled the coach. "Fight! We'll trim them easily. You fellows haven't noticed Dixon of late, have you? Well, I have. He's a wonder."

"Is that so?" they asked eagerly.

"That's the truth. You don't see me worrying, do you? This game is ours."

"We thought he was a dub, Jenkins."

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

"Dub! Was Mellen a dub? Was Turner a dub? He's in their class now."

They slapped each other across happy backs, and went clattering down the stairs. The coach said Dixon had developed into a wonder! Soon Jenkins heard the crowd cheering.

He wiped beads of sweat from his face. If the campus had put on crêpe because Dixon was in the line-up, it would soon have reached the second baseman's ears. That would have meant disaster.

"I spiked that gun," the coach sighed, "but I want no more of it. No wonder my hair is becoming gray."

He went off to bandage Mellen's wrist, only to find that Mellen had bandaged it himself.

That afternoon, with the whole field to themselves and with only the empty benches to see, the infield began its last workout. Jenkins batted the ball at the players. He drove the first hit at Dixon, and the infield held its breath. Dixon took the ball cleanly, and threw true, but with hesitation, to Kaufman.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

“That’s the stuff,” yelled the first baseman.

“Fine work,” shrilled Curtis.

“Oh, I guess this boy’s some class,” droned Kennedy from the side line.

Next the ball went to Kaufman. He took it, and threw to second. The throw was wild, but Dixon sprawled sideways and stopped it. The whole infield shrieked a cheer.

At the start, Dixon’s playing was nervous and uncertain. He wasn’t sure of himself. Under the volleys of praise that now came his way his blood warmed. His movements quickened, and he began to snap his throws. Finally Jenkins smashed the ball down the groove between first and second. Dixon was on his way almost as the hit started. He managed to get the sphere, and for a moment the infield forgot to cheer.

“Pretty work, eh?” laughed Dixon.

At last he was cockily sure of himself. Instantly, without waiting for a poor play that might shake his confidence, the coach stopped the fielding practice.

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

"Didn't I tell you?" he demanded of Dixon.  
"Mellen was never better."

The coach sent out Bartley, Kennedy and Taylor to warm up with Redway. While the pitchers worked, he sat on the bench with the eleventh-hour 'Varsity second baseman and kept telling him how good he was.

"I thought I was hopeless," the boy confided.

"Hopeless!" gasped the coach. "Hear him now."

The other infielders, sitting 'on the bench, were all properly horrified.

The worst ordeal, though, was to come. What if Dixon failed to hit the ball?

Redway, working with the twirlers, caught the coach's eye and signaled that all was ready.

"How about some batting practice?" asked Jenkins carelessly. "I need some exercise; I'll go to second base, and the infield will try to stop your home runs. While one pitcher serves, two can play the outfield. Ready?"

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Dixon wet his lips. "If I fall down now, Jenkins—"

"Come," chided Jenkins; "don't poke fun at me."

Leaving the bench, he met the pitchers near the third-base line.

"Let him hit it," he ordered, "even if you have to throw it at his bat. If he develops confidence put something on the ball and try him out."

They nodded.

"You first, Bartley," Jenkins directed, and Kennedy and Taylor scampered for the outfield.

The captain went to the box. Dixon nervously worked the bat up and down over his right shoulder. Bartley put the first one right over, and Dixon sent it whistling to the far corners.

"A peach," screamed Redway.

"That's the boy," chortled Jenkins, and Dixon flushed with pleasure.

Of the next eight balls pitched, the boy at

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

the plate hit three, but they were all trapped by the infield.

"He has his eye on the ball," sang Kaufman.

Dixon drove the next offering down the right field line. It would have been good for two bases.

He no longer worked the bat with nervous haste. He was steadier; Jenkins could see that at a glance.

"Now, Bartley," the coach shrilled. "Here's where he tears you apart."

The captain understood. The next ball he pitched was a sharp-breaking curve, and Dixon swung and missed.

"Can't hit them all, can you?" laughed Redway.

Dixon was too intent on his work to answer the sally. The next ball was also a curve, but he slashed it past Curtis.

"That's enough for you, Dick," called the coach. "Get in there, Kennedy."

Kennedy, delighted with Dixon's showing,

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

came in grinning. As he passed Jenkins the man spoke softly:

“Give him all you have.”

So Kennedy pitched with the skill that had made him a school star. Two or three times Dixon fouled the ball, but the strikes kept piling up. Then, suddenly, he drove the ball out of the diamond twice in succession. An experienced outfield would have caught each bid for a hit, but Jenkins did not mention that fact. Instead, he called upon all within sound of his voice to behold what was happening to his pitchers.

“Fine work, Dix. Kennedy, you’re bad. He could stand there all day and hit what you have. Come in, Taylor; try to stop this demon.”

Kennedy passed the coach with a wink. Jenkins did not see it. Taylor was fresh and eager, and would probably use his greatest asset, terrific speed. If he made a monkey of Dixon—

Taylor pitched. It was a straight ball, lightning fast, on the outside corner. Dixon swung desperately, and caught the leather near the end

## DOCTORING AN INFILDER

of his bat. It sailed into the air, higher, higher, and on over the fence.

"Good night!" shrieked Kaufman.

"Whew!" breathed Jenkins. The chances were that Dixon would never again make such a hit; this was surely the place to stop. "No more, no more," he called. "This is getting to be murder."

In the gym, while the boys dressed, they kept up a chatter about that mighty blow. Jenkins led them back to the campus. The coach kept glancing at Dixon. Had the boy regained his nerve? Did he now believe in himself? Had the plan worked? Or was his earlier cockiness in the field just a flash in the pan? The coach kept wishing that the substitute would talk. It would be a chance to get a line on the thoughts that were running through his mind.

The boy, though, was strangely silent. They came to the campus, crowded now with students and graduates. A rousing cry greeted them:

"Dixon! Dixon!"

The substitute drew in a quick breath. The

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

coach felt like roaring at him to say something.

Going into Winslow Hall Jenkins made mysterious motions with his head. In the next few seconds the 'Varsity players all remembered that they had forgotten different errands, and departed to perform them. Only the coach was with Dixon when the boy entered his room.

Now was the time to learn whether the substitute would be of any help to St. Mary's on the morrow. The coach swallowed hard.

"Well?" he asked.

The boy swung around. "Jenkins," he cried, "Jenkins, I'm not afraid of any pitcher they'll send in."

Five minutes later the coach electrified the school by doing a reel and jig out on the campus.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WINNING HIT

**I**F St. Mary's had been noisy the night before the game, next morning it became a roaring madhouse. Dignified old graduates grew purple in the face trying to squeeze weird sounds from their aged throats, and young graduates clapped them on the back and told them to "go to it."

Jenkins had ordered the nine to sleep late, but the racket brought the 'Varsity players out of bed far too early to suit the coach. During the morning he nursed them tenderly, and his eyes seldom strayed from Dixon. While the blue and gold cheers were sounding in the streets the new member of the 'Varsity behaved nicely. As soon, though, as Rockton's defy began to rip and roar, the boy's lips began to quiver.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

That could mean two things—nervousness, or eagerness for the fray. What if it was nervousness? True, last night Dixon had said he was not afraid; but the coach had seen many young players, facing their first big game, break at the last moment. Was Dixon on the verge of cracking? Jenkins didn't know. Worse than that, he dared not ply questions for fear that the boy would suspect his own uneasiness.

The early hours dragged away noisily. St. Mary's men, men who had played on the nines of other years, drifted in with reports of what they had heard concerning Rockton's weaknesses. The coach, using his own knowledge as a background, carefully sifted all that was told him. At noon he took Bartley, Kennedy and Taylor, his three pitchers, aside. He had wanted to pitch Bartley, but the strain of that bicycle ride had played havoc with his intentions.

"They can't hit speed," he announced.

The pitchers stared at one another.

## THE WINNING HIT

"With my arm, that leaves me out," sighed Bartley.

Kennedy shook his head sadly. "There's the speed king," he said, pointing to Taylor. "It's his game."

"I can't go nine innings using speed all the time," Taylor protested.

"How many could you go?" Jenkins demanded.

"About five."

"You could go four, Kennedy?"

"Four; yes."

The coach turned to Bartley. "You could go one inning in a pinch?"

The captain nodded. "One inning—and that's about all."

"It must be speed all the time," Jenkins explained. "I never heard of such a nine. They're helpless before speed. They tell me Rockton hasn't made four hits from fast balls all season."

"They've been winning their game," argued Kennedy.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Certainly. Nobody seemed to wake up to their speed weakness. They'll kill a slow ball, or an ordinary curve—they've been doing it, too. But they can't connect with speed. It's a case of pitch your heads off, boys."

"Have you heard who will be in the box for them?" Bartley asked.

"Caldwell," said the coach carelessly.

Curtis, who had gone out a few minutes before, came back excitedly.

"Mellen's left town," he said. "I saw him board the train. He was with his mother."

"Huh!" grunted Taylor. "Couldn't he stay and see the game?"

The coach said nothing, and when he moved away, Kennedy and Bartley followed him.

"Well?" Jenkins asked. "What's up, now?"

The boys shook their heads. The same thought was running through each brain. Was Mellen plotting more mischief and leaving before the trouble started?

Standing there silently, they saw the messenger boy from the station come in, stare about

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a moment and then go straight to Redway. Jenkins became intensely interested. Was this a real telegram from home?

They saw Redway rip open the envelope. The paper he drew out was white, and the man breathed easier. After a while the boy came over and handed the paper to the coach.

Jenkins read it aloud in a guarded voice:

"MR. REDWAY: I must thank you for permitting Samuel to graduate. I arrived early this morning and soon detected the false note in his story about his injured wrist. I forced him to tell me enough to enable me to guess the rest.

"I am deeply grieved that he should have acted as he did. I believe that you would have been justified in having him expelled. He will get his diploma—by mail. My heart was set on seeing him graduate before a dignified audience—I am his mother, you know. But in view of what has happened, I do not think it fair that he should receive his diploma in the way he would have, had his conduct been honorable. I thought that this would be one of the happiest days of my life. We are leaving at once.

"HANNAH MELLEN."

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Bartley sighed. "And he could have been leaving St. Mary's with honors instead of sneaking—"

"I'm not sorry for him," broke in Redway. "I am sorry for his poor mother."

Jenkins handed back the letter. "And this," he snapped, "was to have been the happiest day of her life. I'm sorry I didn't punch his head."

Now a new sound came up from the street—bits of organized cheering and the tramp of many feet. The great gathering was on its way to the field of battle.

Instantly there was a scurry among the 'Varsity players. Each boy made sure that he had his favorite glove; Kaufman had even carried home his pet bat last night and had guarded it in his room. When the campus was quite deserted, Jenkins gave the word to start.

They came out of Winslow Hall walking three abreast. The coach stole a glance at Dixon. The boy's lips were again quivering.

Once within the gym, they charged towards

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the locker room. Hardy and Kaufman, dressed at last, went out and the stands arose to cheer them. Dixon, though in his uniform, lingered in the gym.

Jenkins guessed the cause. Once before, the stands had hooted the boy. True, last night the campus had given him a grand greeting, but would that big, throbbing crowd, familiar with his record, be as loyal? Well, the best thing to do was to get it over with.

"Go out, Dixon," the coach smiled. "Liber up."

The second baseman arose reluctantly, and passed slowly from the gym.

Instantly the coach darted to one of the windows overlooking the green outdoors. He saw Dixon appear on the outfield, and start for the St. Mary's bench in front of the stands. The second baseman went on toward the infield. Then, suddenly, a great, stirring greeting of song broke from the stands:

Here's to you, Larry Dixon!  
Here's to you, good old scout—

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

The coach left the window. The game now seemed to promise more of success than it had before.

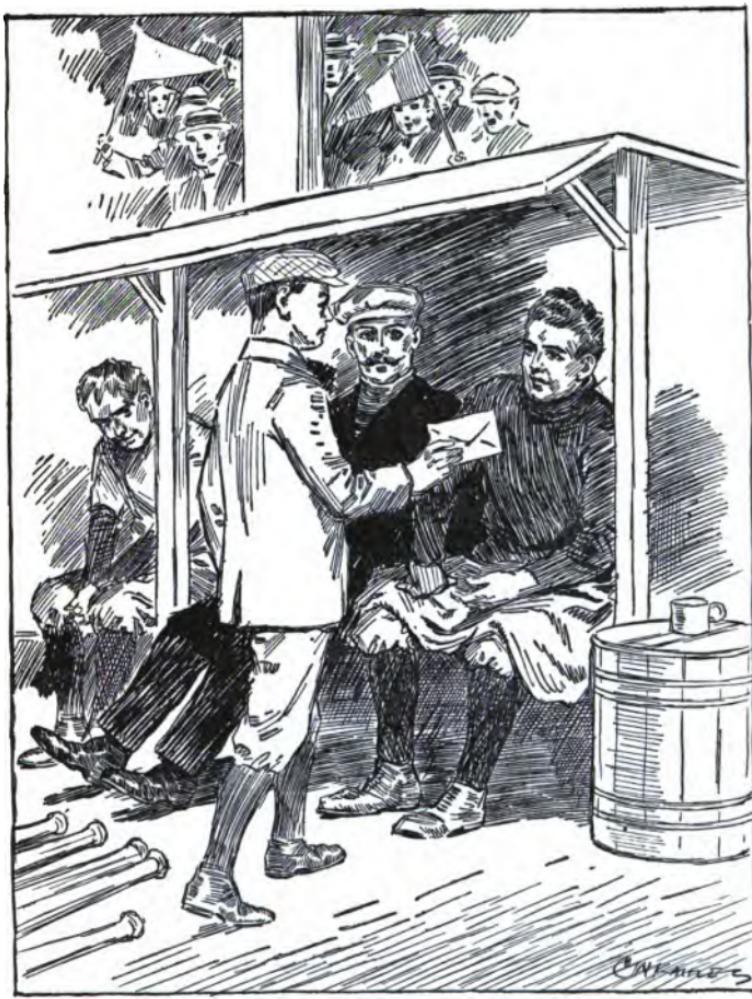
To Bartley, though, the fear of defeat came as a black shadow. Not until he saw the thousands of blue and gold flags waving and heard the roar from the thousands of loyal throats, did he really know how badly he wanted to win this game. The thought that his nine might lose sent tight clutches into his throat.

He warmed up with Taylor and Kennedy, but his eyes were turned more or less on "Hooks" Caldwell. Somehow, he dreaded the Rockton left-handed star. Kennedy and Taylor as they worked found time for a merry quip, but the captain was not in a light-hearted mood. It seemed that even from where he stood he could see Caldwell putting amazing "stuff" on the ball.

He came in to the bench and sat down beside Jenkins. "Watching Caldwell?"

"No; Dixon."

The captain had forgotten the second base-



**"A boy brought Bartley a note."**

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man. Now a trace of alarm crept into his voice.

“How is he, Jenkins?”

“I don’t know.”

Redway came in lugging along his big catcher’s mitt.

“Who has the speed?” Jenkins demanded.

“Taylor.”

“Then Taylor pitches. His first big game, and Dixon’s first big game. Fine!”

Five minutes later the umpires announced the batteries. A boy brought Bartley a note. The captain read it quickly:

“May the best nine win.

“CALDWELL’S FATHER.”

Sitting side by side on the bench, Jenkins and Bartley almost held their breaths as the game opened. When Taylor pitched the ball plunked into Redway’s mit with a thud that could be heard all over the field. Taylor was using speed—terrific, dazzling speed—and he was not wasting a pitch. The first two were strikes.

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The batter hit the next, and the ball bounded toward Dixon.

Jenkins caught himself just as he was about to come to his feet. With tortured eyes he saw the second baseman take the ball cleanly, and then throw true to Kaufman. The whole play had taken only seconds, but those seconds had been agony. The stands turned loose a cheer, and the coach felt like joining in with all his heart.

"Well?" questioned the captain.

"Great!" breathed Jenkins. "Now, if he can only hit."

Dixon didn't come to bat until the second inning, and then two were down. The coach pursed his lips anxiously, and again his eyes were tortured. The first two balls were wide, and Dixon let them pass.

"He has his eye, anyway," muttered Jenkins.

The next two were strikes; after that another ball. With the count three and two Jenkins began talking aloud:

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Come, now, Dix; don't let him fool you. Don't be too anxious; don't— There!"

Dixon had swung. The ball drifted to the outfield and sank into a waiting fielder's hands.

"Well," said the coach, "he hit it. That should give him courage."

Jenkins had ordered speed, and his judgment was being vindicated. Before Taylor's cannon-ball delivery the Rockton batters were helpless.

But Bartley had also proved a good guesser. He had feared Caldwell. The left-hander was making the ball fairly talk, and the St. Mary's boys could not translate the language it spoke. The game settled down to a pitcher's battle. The nine that scored first would about sew up the victory.

"If we had Mellen's bat," Jenkins found himself repeating, and at once checked this line of thought. It wasn't fair to Dixon—and out on the diamond Dixon was giving a dandy exhibition of how second base should be played.

The fourth inning came. Dixon was first up. The coach spoke confidently.

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"You have his number, Dix. Pound it on the nose."

The boy made a desperate fight for a hit. Five times he fouled off good ones. Finally he dumped the ball toward third base, and by magnificent sprinting, beat out the throw. Jenkins was as happy as though somebody had presented him with a bag of gold.

"He got the first hit," he exulted. "Next time he stands a chance of killing it."

St. Mary's rooted for a run, but Redway and Taylor were easy victims. Then, with two out, Dixon, who had not been advanced, was given a signal from the bench to steal. He went down on the first ball pitched. The Rockton catcher was not caught napping, and as Dixon started to slide, the Rockton second baseman took the catcher's throw. But when the baseman bent down he found that Dixon's body was going away from him. Bewildered, he stabbed with the ball and touched only the ground. Then the runner's legs hooked around him and just reached the bag. It was the first time the Rock-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ton infielder had ever seen the fallaway slide, and he stood up shamefaced and confused. The stands were roaring.

"Great!" laughed Jenkins. "Keep it up, boy."

"Did you see it?" gasped Bartley. "Wow!"

Caldwell, though, smiled serenely. A hit now would mean a run, so Caldwell proceeded to strike out the next batter.

In this inning Rockton also registered its first hit. Though the enemy did not score, Jenkins noticed that Taylor was now pitching an alarming number of bad balls and was thus taxing his arm all the more. When the inning ended, the coach waited until Redway reached the bench. Then:

"How's his speed?" he asked.

"Going," said the catcher briefly.

Taylor pitched the fifth inning, and Jenkins felt Bartley's hand anxiously pressing his arm. If Rockton scored— But Rockton didn't. Luck was with St. Mary's. A ringing three-base hit set the Rockton stands wild, but the

## THE WINNING HIT

smash came after two were out. The last batter was too anxious, and fouled to the vigilant Redway on a ball that he should have let pass. Taylor came in to the bench breathing heavily.

"Speed, speed, speed," he grumbled. "It's fierce. I told you I was good for only five innings."

"Your turn, Kennedy," said Jenkins. He knew that Kennedy was not a pitcher with a "smoke ball" and that his best was a slow floater. Speed would ravage Kennedy's arm. The coach turned to Bartley. "Get behind the stands and warm up. Here, one of you subs, get out with him."

The nine shivered. Bartley was, this season, its weakest pitcher. If he had to go in, and if Caldwell kept going at his present pace—

The players seemed to lose heart. Their stick work in the last half of the next inning was a joke. Caldwell, when he left the box, was openly laughing. Jenkins was tasting bitter medicine. Yet he played his game without flinching. It would have been folly to scorn the

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enemy's pitching. Jenkins made a master move.

"It's lucky for us," he admitted, "that Caldwell's only good for eight or nine innings. Just hold them; this is our game."

"Does he weaken around the ninth?" asked Curtis.

"Like a rag," the coach answered, and the players scampered out to their places with fresh courage.

One of the substitutes plucked at Jenkins's sleeve. "Didn't Caldwell pitch fourteen innings against Marshall?"

"If you say that again I'll choke you," the man hissed, and that particular substitute saw a great light.

Behind the stands, Bartley warmed up easily, using only straight balls, trying no curves. The minutes passed. He could hear the clamor of the crowd, but he could only guess what it meant. Once, after he had been there a long while, he heard a roaring yell, and then a quick, disappointed dying away of the sound. Some-

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body had evidently made a mighty bid for a hit. Who? The stands told him:

"Rah! Rah! Rah! Dixon!"

"Better luck next time, old man."

The captain felt his heart warm. He had told Jenkins that Dixon could play ball. He wondered what was happening out on the field. Suppose— His blood ran cold, and the warmth left his heart. Suppose Rockton won?

Doggedly he went back to his work—the coach had sent him out to warm up. The crowd became noisy again. Now he could hear the Rockton cheer, louder, louder—

Another substitute came running behind the stands. "Hurry!" he begged. "They're slamming Kennedy."

The captain broke into a quick trot. "Have they scored?"

"Not yet."

"What inning is it?"

"Beginning of the eighth."

He went straight to the bench. Kennedy, in near the plate, was making a great show of talk-

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ing the situation over with Redway, thus purposely delaying the game. Bartley looked at the coach.

"Go in," said Jenkins. His face was gray. The substitutes looked sick.

The captain, walking toward the diamond, did not hear the cheers. His eyes took in the situation. Three on the bases. He accepted the ball from Kennedy.

"How many out?"

"Two."

Redway put his lips to Bartley's ear. "Speed!" he begged. "Right up around his shoulders."

The captain nodded. As he pitched, he could feel his muscles jerk and protest against the desperate strength he called to his aid. The ball was almost a blur as it sped to the plate, and the batter's eyes bulged. Yet he tried his best, swinging bravely. His best, though, after two strikes and two balls had come to him, was a lofty, twisting fly to the infield.

Bartley had pitched only five balls. Never-

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theless, with his arm in its present condition, even that much told. He said nothing to the coach, for, with the danger past, some of the color had come back to the man's face.

In the last half of that inning Jenkins tried hard to make some headway. Now jollying, now commanding, now entreating, he did his best, only to find Caldwell still supreme.

The ninth inning was played to a steady, clamorous boom and rattle of sound. Bartley taxed his arm as it had never been taxed before. He "got" the first three boys who faced him, but there were many fouls and many pitches that went wide of the plate, and, in all, he threw seventeen balls before the side was retired. He came in from the field with hope almost gone. Another inning, he felt, would finish him. The coach knew it.

Yet Jenkins fought with heart and soul. Curtis was first at bat.

"This is the inning he weakens, Curt," he chirped. "Get your hit."

The third baseman grounded out.

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

"Only one gone, Hardy." Jenkins's voice was steady. "He can't last. Get him."

Hardy struck out.

Bartley saw the coach wince. Still the man retained his confident bearing.

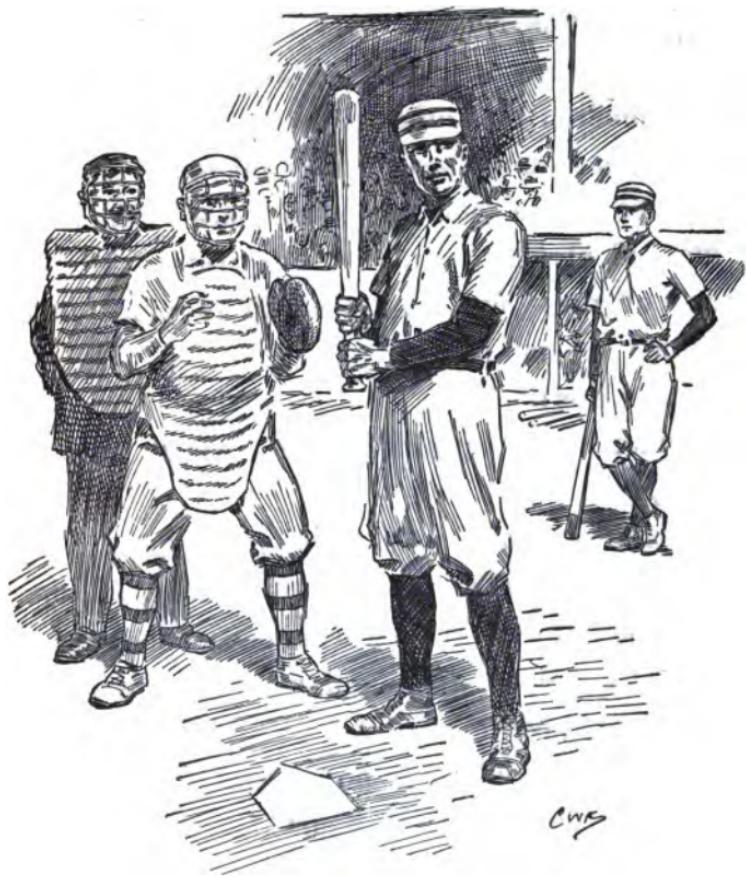
"Now, Kaufman! Pick out a good one. I'm watching him. He's about all in."

"Huh!" grunted Hardy.

Kaufman drove a savage grounder toward the third baseman, and the stands of blue and gold groaned. The infielder took the ball on a bound, juggled it and then let it fall. Instantly he recovered it, but now he was off his balance. Nevertheless he threw, and the white sphere sailed far over the first baseman's head.

The groan died, and one wild yell broke from the stands. Jenkins—Jenkins, the calm, the steady—sprang to his feet.

"Who's up?" Then he caught himself. To forget his own batting order was a fine way to preach calmness to his boys. He dropped back on the bench. "Oh! Dixon!"



"With Dixon at the plate, the great Caldwell pitched."

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

Kaufman had reached third base on the wild throw. A hit—

Dixon was bending over the uneven line of bats. Plainly he was hesitating. The coach remembered that other game when Dixon, in a pinch, had almost asked to be taken out so that somebody else could bat in his place. The man glanced along the line of substitutes. Which one of these could he send in to pinch hit? Which one had heart?

“Jenkins!”

Dixon was speaking. The coach turned sharply.

“He’ll probably use speed, eh, Jenkins? He must be somewhat rattled after that play, eh? A rattled pitcher always uses speed, doesn’t he? Isn’t that about all he thinks of? Guess I’ll take a light bat!”

The coach could only nod. And he had been searching for a boy with heart!

“Soak it, Dix,” Bartley pleaded. “Soak it.”

All in a minute it happened. With Dixon at the plate, the great Caldwell pitched. Yes, it

## THE WINNING HIT

was speed—and such speed! But Dixon had expected just this. His light bat snapped forward.

The stands heard the crack and saw the first baseman dive to the right. Then a puff of white dust showed where the ball struck ten feet in back of first base, and well within the foul line. Nobody saw where the ball went—after that.

Delirious joy swept the field. On the St. Mary's bench boys hugged each other, and danced out where they could be seen by the wild crowd.

Happiness was singing in Bartley's veins. His nine had won the big game. Yet, in all the riot of that mad moment of victory, one thought was in his mind. Plunging in among his players he plucked at arms and hands, and shouted in deaf ears. At last they heard him. He motioned them to follow, and ran out on the diamond.

The crowd was beginning to pour out on the field. The Rockton players, dejected, misera-

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE

ble, were moving to their dressing-room alongside the gym. Caldwell, in the rear, trudged on with hanging head. Suddenly he felt his progress blocked. Looking up, he found the St. Mary's players surrounding him.

"Rubbing it in!" he asked angrily.

The great crowd was beginning to look on. What was happening? Thousands of eyes saw Bartley's arm rise, and then fall. The St. Mary's players turned loose a shrill yell:

"Caldwell! Caldwell! Rah! Rah! Rah!  
Caldwell!"

Those nearest the boys took it up. It spread to the stands. In a moment, St. Mary's and Rockton men were shrieking one crashing refrain that rang from fence to fence:

"Caldwell! Caldwell! Caldwell!"

The Rockton pitcher reached out and gripped Bartley's hand.

While out on the field the nine, anxious to do honor to a worthy foeman, had forgotten Dixon. Once within the gym, however, they fell upon him with rough affection.

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"Quit it," he protested as they tried to swing him a-top their shoulders. "You'd think I was a hero."

"You are," they yelled.

"I'm not. Why, if I had fallen down in the pinch, after the way Jenkins and Bartley trusted me and put me in the big game, I—I—"

"You what?" demanded the coach with mock severity.

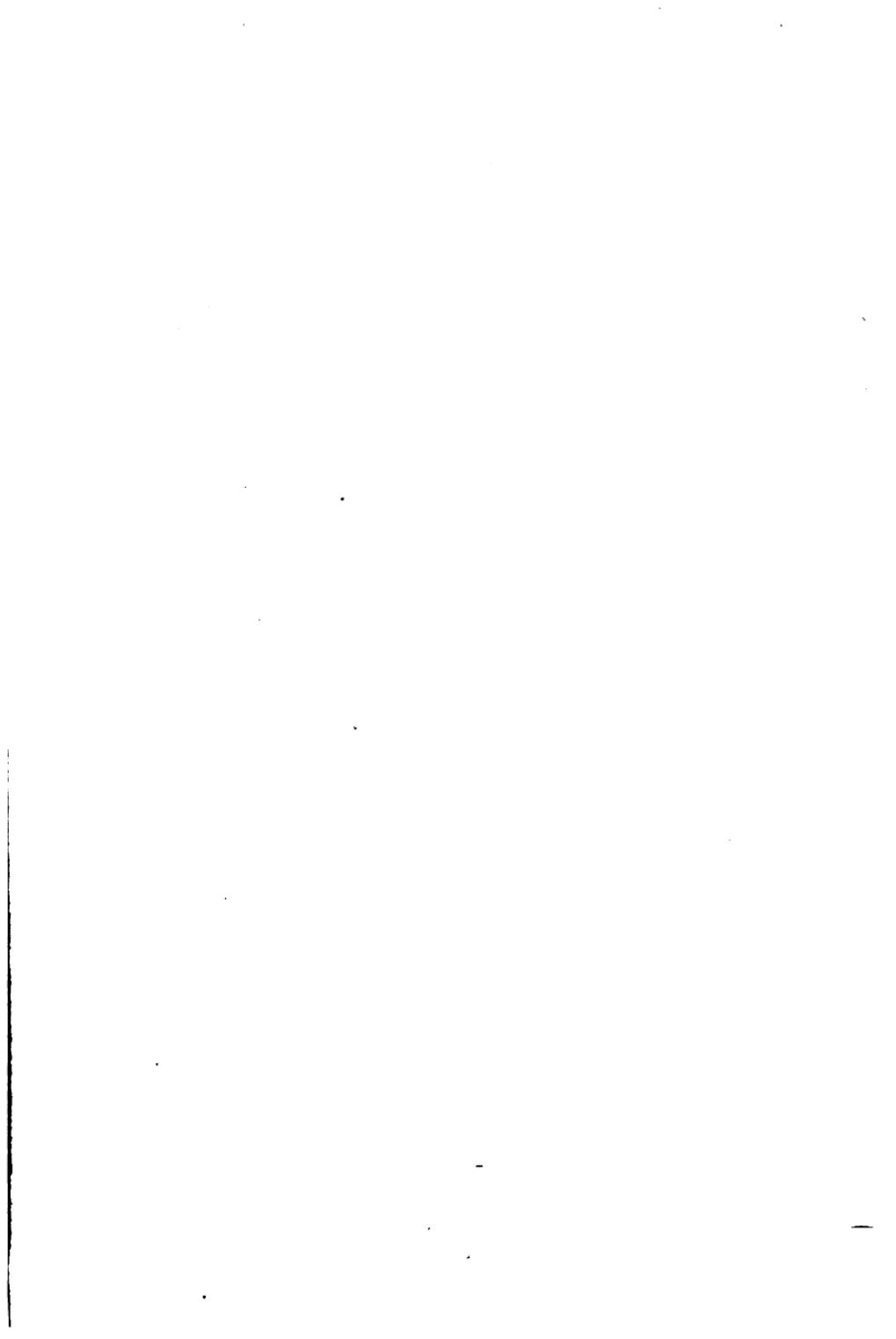
"I—I wouldn't have been a St. Mary's man, that's all," answered the second baseman stoutly.

The frolic died into a soft silence. Jenkins, after a little while, cleared his throat. His voice rose in a ringing tribute:

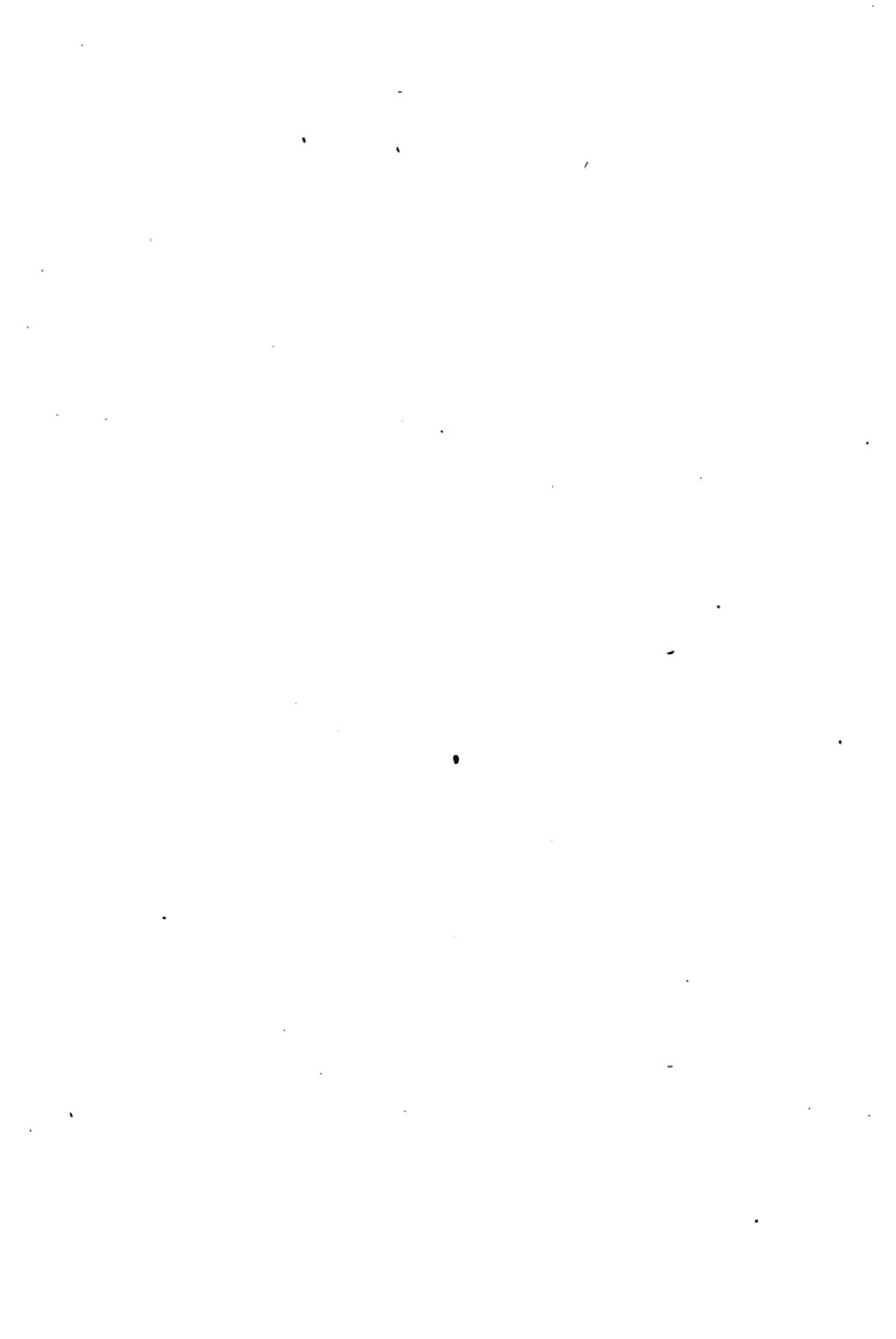
Hail ye true and loyal sons,  
Stout of heart, in danger strong—

Boyish voices joined with a rush in the old war song of the blue and gold. Dixon blinked his eyes to keep back the happy tears.











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